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Beginnings of the Christian Church

By

WILLIAM DAVID SCHERMERHORN

PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY AND MISSIONS

GARRETT BIBLICAL INSTITUTE

Approved by the Committee on Curriculum of the Board
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THE METHODIST BOOK CONCERN

NEW YORK

CINCINNATI

CHICAGO

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

WILLIAM CAREY INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
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PREFACE

BEGINNINGS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH is designed to be used in the work of young people and adults in church schools, young people's societies, or in special groups. It is hoped that it will give an orderly and competent outline of those "beginnings." It is not designed for advanced classes and so has omitted both technical and critical discussions. It is believed that the positions taken will be in harmony with sound learning, and, in general, will not need revision upon more advanced study. If the book promotes Christian knowledge and helps to Christianize attitudes in life, the purpose of its writing will be realized.

Questions for review and discussion are added in the hope that they will help fix important facts in mind and stimulate discussion which will relate these facts to life. Every chapter has some reference to contemporaneous life or thought, and it is believed that the pupil will see early Christianity in relation to the world in which it had its rise and spread, and will thus come to think of his religion as related to rather than apart from the life of the world.

Brief bibliographies are added so that further study may be pursued if desired, by either teacher or pupils. It is understood, of course, that the suggestion of a bibliography does not imply indorsement of all the views of all the books listed. These lists, however, will present the discussion in these fields, and enable the student to form independent judgments.

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W. D. SCHERMERHORN,
Garrett Biblical Institute.

January, 1929.

CHAPTER I

THE NEW TESTAMENT WORLD

ON the cross of Jesus was written, after the manner of Roman executions, the accusation under which he was condemned: "This is the King of the Jews." A very significant thing about this inscription is that it was written in three languages: in Greek, in Latin, and in Hebrew.¹ This meant that the culture of three races blended in the civilization of that day. To understand the church of that age it is necessary that we know something of the history, ideals, and genius of these peoples. They constitute the "environment of early Christianity," and Christianity is best studied in relation to its environment.

The Greek. More than three centuries before the birth of Jesus, Alexander the Great crossed from Europe into Asia and in about a score of years established an empire extending from the Adriatic on the west to the Indus on the east, and from the Black Sea on the north to Egypt on the south. The conquest of Alexander was one of those world-events which shook things from center to circumference and made it impossible that they should ever return to conditions as they were; we can best understand it by comparing it with the World War of 1914-18. The threatening menace of Eastern civilization with the autocracy of its rulers, with the slavery of the ruled, with its low and crude ideals of morals and religion, was pushed back, and the Greek civilization, which took over and carried the high ideals of the philosophers and statesmen of the Attic age, was taken abroad and planted in new soil. The Greek called for fullness of life. His striving was for complete self-expression. Within limits, he believed in democracy; and the education given in the government of the city-state was now to be diffused and popularized in the wide

¹ John 19. 19-20.

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empire of Alexander. The Greek philosopher, in his quest for truth and with his respect for any man who had the truth, went along with the teachers and organizers who followed the armies of Alexander.

A Common Tongue. Perhaps the chief gain to the world of the early church through the Greek was a universal language. Many nations had been amalgamated into one great empire. For the time at least national boundary-walls and lines of racial separation were largely obliterated, although each group had its own vernacular. But there was one speech in which a man could be understood anywhere in the Mediterranean world; it was the tongue of Alexander and his successors. The philosophers lectured and wrote in Greek. The fishermen in their loud and jangling voices at the place of market bought and sold in Greek. The Roman soldiers,² as they went abroad and had to do with the varying groups who came beneath their rule, spoke Greek. Josephus, that most cultured of Jewish scholars and citizens, was at this time writing his celebrated *Antiquities* in Greek. And going out through the Hebrew world into every synagogue from Alexandria to Babylon and then to Rome was the Septuagint, a translation of the Jewish Scriptures into Greek. When the apostle Paul began sending out those letters which were afterward taken up and enshrined in the Christian Scriptures, in order that they might have universal use, they were written in Greek. So, throughout the world this language was a common medium of expression among all peoples.

It is true that the national grandeur of Greece had passed away and the Greek classics had given way to a more popular literature, but the Greek civilization remained as an alluvial deposit from which there continued to spring the fruits of a varied and excellent culture.

The Roman. The Romans had taken over the government. While they did not push as far to the east as Alexander, they went farther west and north and certainly to the then known limits of the south. With their genius for

² Acts 21. 37.

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organization and administration they became the political rulers of the world. Some elements of the Roman rule should be noticed:

Peace. They kept the peace. It was done with the "Big Stick." The provincial governors, whatever else they did, were expected to keep down insurrections and rebellions of every kind. Nothing would cause a Roman officer so quickly to lose his place as to have it known to the emperor that things were not quiet in that part of the empire to which he had been assigned.³ So the *Pax Romana* was not merely a theory, but a real achievement.

Safety. With peace there was safety. Certain it is that a traveler in Asia Minor or Syria, or even in certain parts of Italy, was safer both in life and in treasure than he would be at the present time, after two thousand years of further civilization. The Romans ruled strictly, even brutally and harshly, but thoroughly. The offenders against the Roman law were crucified upon the high hills. Arms were cut off, eyes were gouged out. The Romans were past masters in the matter of administering punishment, but it was to the end that people should learn to be obedient to authority and thus to be good citizens of this world empire.

Roads. In order that the administration of Rome might be effective it was necessary that she construct and maintain open means of communication from the heart of the empire to its farthest limit. Hundreds of miles of paved roads, some of which are in use even to this day, extended from Rome in every direction. And where the roads were not paved, they were graded. Rivers and streams were bridged. The Roman soldier could march or the courier could run with swiftness upon his tasks. Regularly established lines of ships,⁴ both for passengers and for freight, plied between the harbors of the Mediterranean, bringing the grain from Egypt and the products of Syria and of Anatolia to feed the multitudes in the populous cities farther west and north. These roads and sea-ways, while

³ Acts 19. 40.

⁴ Acts 27. 6.

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maintained or encouraged by the government largely for its own use, nevertheless became an invitation to the multitudes to travel; and there was much shifting from place to place with the consequent broadening of mind and of sympathy throughout the empire.

Religion. Rome knew that she could not successfully rule a people who were not held by the sanctions of religion; so it became a part of her administrative policy to see that all well-established faiths should be respected and encouraged. Under Hadrian, about 120 A. D., she built in her capital city the celebrated Pantheon, where were set up the images of the chief deities of the whole Roman Empire. A devotee of any of these faiths coming from his own land to Rome could worship his god there. Over and above all these lesser gods stood the emperor as the center of the state religion. Augustus was declared by the Senate to be a *divus*, that is, a "divinity"; and oaths during the time of the early church were required to be taken in the name of the local deity and by the "genius of the Emperor." The gradual shaking of the faith of the people in their old gods and the increasing might of the Roman rule with its patronage and advantages, tended to give to the citizens of the Roman Empire the feeling that in a very real sense the gods had placed their power upon him who sat at the head of that great government.

Citizenship, with all its rights and privileges, was given not only to the dweller in Italy, nor only to certain select groups, but men of every race in the Roman Empire were eligible either by purchase, by imperial benefaction, or by heredity to obtain this valued status. To be a Roman citizen was to hold a coveted estate.⁵ Throughout the organization, from the emperor to the lowest menial in some petty court in some far-off land, there was an established ideal which called for justice. It was of the "eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a-tooth" kind, but it held the world and unified it under the grip of this strong people who had such mastery for ruling.

The Jew, history. The third race which any student of

⁵ Acts 16. 37-39; 22. 25-29.

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Christianity must consider was, of course, the Jew. From the glorious days of David and Solomon, passing successively under the rule of Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Egyptian, Seleucid, through a century of independence and under the Roman rule, this proud race had kept its unity and its religion. Dwelling in their own Holy Land as a center, they were distributed through every country and city and in almost every town of the Roman Empire. While they were subject to Rome, they were not servile. They were given more privileges than perhaps any other group in the empire. They were allowed to become citizens if they wished and could qualify. They had, in Palestine at least, jurisdiction through their Sanhedrins over their own people, not only in matters religious but civil as well. The death penalty only was reserved. They were required to pay tribute to Rome, but this, in Palestine, was collected and remitted by the Jews themselves. The customs only were collected directly by the Roman publicans. The Roman government received the Jews into their armies, gave them place as government officials, and permitted them to keep the Sabbath and observe other Jewish customs. They were allowed the right of assembly throughout the empire and of unrestricted travel to and from their great feasts. They were permitted to collect the Temple tax from their people throughout the empire. The Roman rule was a generous paternalism.

Religion. The Jew had a passion for religion. He had a great literature which was practically all religious. Our Old Testament was included in this literature. He had an organization for instruction which established a synagogue in every town where there could be found ten or more heads of families. He had through these synagogues a system of worship extending up to the magnificent ritual of the central house of worship, the Temple at Jerusalem. Into the synagogue in every village the Gentiles, under certain conditions, were admitted. The high ethical precepts, and the lofty conception of God, with the passion to realize rectitude of life, made their appeal to tens of thousands who, though not caring to undertake the ceremonial requirements of the Jewish faith, were nevertheless to be

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counted, in the language of the book of Acts, as "those that feared God."⁶

Sects. The common division of the Jews into Sadducees and Pharisees is quite insufficient. It is true that these parties, which originated in the days of Maccabean struggle, still persisted. The contention of the Pharisees against the intrusion of Greek culture and the imposition of Roman rule⁷ was still in evidence. The good-natured Sadducee, who was in possession of most of the offices, was still quite willing to receive any measure of enlargement from the Greek and to perform such services for the Roman as would not compromise his religion. He thought it would be good to "leave well enough alone."

But there is another classification which ought to be made on the religious outlook of the Jews. There had grown up among them a group who had an expectation of the Messiah who should come, and who should set up among them, and for the world, the kingdom of heaven. Some thought of him as a mighty King in the lineal succession from David. Others thought of God himself by miracle accomplishing this end. They expected it to be done catastrophically, suddenly, visibly, triumphantly. This group may be called the "Apocalyptists." Over against these were the Legalists, who found their delight in the study of the Scriptures. They interpreted and applied the law. They studied the vast literature of comment and former decisions which had to do with the law. They spun out to endless lengths the details of the rules for clean and unclean, for the Sabbath and for feast days, to the end that through high reverence for the Scripture and its application to the most minute details of life there might be brought in the reign of righteousness among men.

Idealism. The important thing to be seen is this: that the Jew was possessed of a deathless ethical ideal which looked toward the establishment on earth of a society in which the will of a holy God should be done in the lives of the people—the kingdom of God. Whether it should

⁶ Acts 10. 2; 13. 16.

⁷ Matt. 22. 15-17.

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come suddenly or by process, they were all committed to the bringing in of this day.

Pagan religions. No study of this age would be complete which did not consider the other religions which were doing what they were able to do in meeting the spiritual needs of the vast multitude throughout the empire. It is true that the old and traditional gods and goddesses of the classical Greek and Roman periods had in large measure lost their hold upon the thoughtful and even the popular mind. They were too small for the enlarging world of this day. But the human heart cannot rest without religion of some kind.

Philosophy. There were the philosophers, high-minded seekers after truth. They wrought out for themselves a theory of God, of life, and of destiny which seemed best to conform to reality. Some of the noblest words from human pen may be found in the writings of Cicero, Epictetus, Seneca, and others of their type. Canon Farrar has written a book, setting forth at some length choice selections from these men, and has aptly called his collection *Seekers After God*. Such indeed they were. But they moved on too exalted and severe a level to be of great service to the multitudes. It is true that the Stoic-Cynic philosophers in their day, like the Salvation Army of our day, preached their gospel upon the street corners, and doubtless they did much to keep alive that hunger for righteousness which the Christian missionaries found as they went about on their mission; but these could not meet the whole need.

The "Mysteries." There was a deep sense of sin among the people. There was a cry for deliverance. There was a seeking after assurance of a joyous future life. In answer to these religious yearnings there had come into the Roman Empire certain other great religions. There were the Eleusinian Mysteries, with their services of initiation at Athens and Eleusis. There was the cult of Dionysus (or Bacchus), which was a crude nature-worship in which the devotees experienced divine infilling which was taken to be the earnest of a happy immortality. Not only did the worshiper partake of the wine, which "enthused" him, but he ate of the flesh and drank of the blood of the

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sacred victim in which the god was said to be incarnated. There was the cult of the Phrygian goddess, Cybele, and her consort, Attis. These were "nature-religions," in which there were a dying and rising again on the part of the deity, which death and resurrection were believed to be communicated to the devotee by reason of his participation in the sacred rites. There was the worship of Diana, which is mentioned in the 19th chapter of the Acts,⁸ a deification of the productive forces in nature. There was Astrology coming westward from Chaldea and influencing the practices of other cults, calling men to the calmness and purity of the stars. There was Mithraism, which seems to have had a large part in the life of the Roman soldier. There came up from Egypt the cult of Isis, Osiris, and Serapis, and this spread extensively over the Roman world. There was Gnosticism, which certainly existed previous to Christianity in some form. It was a religion of mysterious "wisdom" and "enlightenment" entered into by initiation.

Christianity triumphant. These and many other forms of religious expression were to be found throughout the Roman world. The empire was as full of religion as "an egg is full of meat." The hearts of men were seeking after truth, after rest, for assurance of a blessed immortality. These religions were making the greatest possible effort to answer the demands. Christianity, coming at this time, did not merely "fill up a void," but it had to contend for its right with ancient and well-established religious systems having their own literature, ceremonials, and priesthood, and making tremendous appeal; and it was against these, and because of its sheer worth, that Christianity won. This conflict will be discussed in Chapters IX and XII.

The "fullness of time." There are those who, looking at the world of this time, regard it as decadent, run down, dying, with no soundness in it. There are others, on the contrary, who think of it as a period of exceptional culture, of rare civilization, and pregnant with life. Certainly, the truth lies between these two extremes; probably nearer the

⁸ Acts 19. 23-38.

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second than the first. Evidently, a change was imminent. Even to a man who does not take God into account it would seem that the appearance of Christianity was an inevitable thing at this period of world development. To the devout Christian the Greek culture, the Roman law, the Hebrew passion for the kingdom of heaven, and the universal longing for the satisfaction of a life which reaches out beyond human limitations—these had indeed made “ready the way of the Lord”; and the coming of Jesus and the faith which grew up about him were in “the fullness of time.”

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. In what languages were the words of the inscription on Jesus' cross?
2. How do you explain the presence in Palestine of these three languages?
3. Who was chiefly responsible for the penetration of Greek culture into the Orient? When?
4. Who was Josephus and what did he do?
5. What was the Septuagint?
6. What were some of the benefits of Roman rule?
7. What was the attitude of the Roman government toward religion?
8. What land was the home of the Jews?
9. What privileges and responsibilities did they have under Roman rule?
10. Who were the Pharisees? the Sadducees? the Apocalypticists? the Legalists?
11. What was the chief ethical ideal of the Jewish people?
12. What philosophies of high ethical type were contemporaneous with early Christianity?
13. What were the Mystery Religions?
14. In what sense can it be said that Christ came in the “fullness of time”?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the advantages in studying any subject in relation to its environment?

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2. Are there common values which are sought in all great religions?

3. Shall we think of Christianity as "destroying," "supplanting," or "fulfilling" the religious aspirations of the world into which it came?

4. If Jesus were again to walk this earth, would he say to the Buddhist, the Confucianist, the Hindu, the Moslem, as he said to the Jew, "I came not to destroy, but to fulfill"?

5. Is our own age ripe for some great religious and ethical impulse? If so, what shall it be?

6. Shall we believe that the followers of pagan religions were doomed to eternal death?

7. Were the followers of ancient religions more or less devoted to their deities than we?

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CHAPTER II

THE TWELVE—THEIR PREPARATION

Their name. Jesus desired intimate and sympathetic companionship. He also needed men who should catch up and carry out to the world the good news which he proclaimed. Mark says:¹ "And he appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have authority to cast out demons." There are four lists of this apostolic group given us: in Matthew 10, Mark 3, Luke 6, and Acts 1. The names given by Matthew and Mark correspond exactly. Luke gives in the place of Thaddæus the name Judas the son of James, which name also appears in the first chapter of Acts. The King James Version of Matthew 10 mentions the name Lebbæus as being equivalent to Thaddæus, thus giving this disciple a third name. "Lebbæus" does not appear in any of the revised versions. The first chapter of Acts omits, of course, the name of Judas Iscariot, who, having betrayed his Lord, was now dead, and tells of the choice by the disciples, with solemn prayer and casting of lots, of Matthias.² Popular thought, however, has usually put the name of Paul into the apostolic group and forgotten Matthias. There is not sufficient reason for this omission. He is certainly as well known to the church as some of the other minor members of this group and was probably in every way as devout, as well trained, and as effective.

"Apostles." These twelve have usually been called "The Apostles." In Acts 1 the Jewish-Christian group in Jerusalem seemed to think it quite important that the exact number of twelve should be maintained; that the "Apostolic College" might be complete.³ Certain sections of the Christian Church have followed this sense of importance

¹ Mark 3. 14.

² Acts 1. 26.

³ Acts 1. 15-22.

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thus given to these men, and have not only given them credit for the more intimate knowledge of Jesus and of his teaching, which they must have possessed by reason of their association with him, but have also surrounded them with a sort of official sanctity and set them apart as a higher rank of ministers than any others who followed them. This was hardly in the thought of Jesus. Taking the whole account, certainly the early church did not set the "twelve" in a very distinctly identified group by themselves. Paul and Barnabas,⁴ James the brother of Jesus,⁵ and Andronicus and Junius⁶ are referred to as "apostles," and in the early Christian literature references are made to a class of ministers who were known as apostles whose work seemed to be simply that of itinerant missionaries. As such they were entitled to their support while in any community, and were sent from one place to the other to preach the word." The word "apostle" is merely the Greek equivalent for the Latin word "missionary" and seems to mean "one who is sent forth." The modern missionary, either on the wide-stretching frontiers of our own country, in the crowded sections of our great cities, or in the non-Christian world, corresponds very nearly, both in work and in rank, to these early heralds of the "Good News." They were to be "my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."⁷ Not all of these men have attained to historical immortality. It is thought that the meager records which we have of them are due to the fact that those who wrote our biblical narratives did not happen to be familiar with their work, though it may have been as dramatic, as effective, and as far-reaching as that of those apostles who are better known. It is more probable that they worked in less conspicuous ways. Only three or four of the twelve were outstandingly prominent. A group of twelve could with difficulty withstand the strain if there were more than three or four "men of genius" among them!

Education and training. Certainly, these men were not "educated" in the bookish sense, although in all probability

⁴ Acts 14. 14.

⁵ Gal. 1. 19.

⁶ Rom. 16. 7.

⁷ Acts 1. 8.

THE TWELVE—THEIR PREPARATION

they had the rudiments of a general education. They all had the historical inheritance of centuries of religious endeavor which belonged to every Jew; they had the Jewish passion for religion and that kind of religion which produced character. They had the training of Jewish homes and Jewish synagogues, and that of the elaborate symbolism of the Temple sacrifices and ritual. They had the rugged health, the sincere honesty, the persistent industry, perhaps the unfailing patience, which belonged to their calling, and as a final and very important element, every one of these men had the consuming expectation⁸ that something was about to happen for the cause of Jehovah among his own people. "Blessed is the man who expecteth something to happen, for verily he shall not be disappointed!"

Classification. There was the union of opposites in this group. Bruce⁹ makes a loose classification of three groups having four men each: those who were well known, those who were less known, and those who were least or worst known. A very good suggestion is that the classification can be made according to temperament: that there were certain men of impulsive nature, others of the more affectionate and mystical sort, others who were disposed to be legalists, another group of the more practical and business kind who would care for the finances and look after the details of their work. Thus the twelve represented the whole church in miniature; and just as the modern church, to minister truly to all who need it, must be sufficiently broad to include and make provision for men of every temperament and type, so Jesus chose that among those trained to carry his message there should be men of tastes and capacities as varying as were, for example, Peter and John. The church of to-day needs to learn this lesson. There is always a tendency to limit its membership to a particular constituency, to prepare the service which shall appeal only to a particular temperament, or even to insist that only those who belong to certain schools of theology may travel with us.

⁸ Matt. 20. 21; Luke 22. 24; Acts 1. 6.

⁹ *Training of the Twelve.*

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Jewish training. The apostles were well trained. Mention has already been made of what they derived by virtue of being members of the Jewish community. It was no small thing that they had the religious history of the descendants of Abraham back of them and that the whole round of religious, secular, and vocational training which belonged to Jewish youth had been given to them. That they were men of good and perhaps more than average intelligence almost goes without saying. They were chosen from among the multitude of disciples who were already following Jesus. Having been selected, they went with him and became students in a course of training at once unique, the most fascinating, and the most effective that the world has ever known.

The method of Jesus. The method of Jesus is worth the study of the educational world of to-day. There were no formal lesson assignments, no stated hours for recitation. Some modern educators contend that, ideally, the whole fixed course of study should be abolished, the matter of examinations and making of percentum grades thrown aside, and that the extension of something like the kindergarten method throughout the whole course would give best results; that men should study what they like, under conditions which are agreeable and in such a way as would not be burdensome, using a variety of seeing, hearing, and doing to fix the lessons permanently in mind. This was the thing Jesus did for these men. Going about with him they heard his words, observed his habits of worship, of service, of friendly intercourse with persons of all classes. They saw his mighty deeds and knew not only of restored health, but of sins forgiven and of the change of life from vice to virtue by reason of his sympathetic touch. They saw the people who felt themselves crushed and having no objective in life strengthened and aroused. His accusers spoke the truth of him in more than one sense when they said, "He stirreth up the people."¹⁰ He had rare art in fixing in their memories his teaching, throwing it frequently into the form of a story,¹¹ making it cut by the

¹⁰ Luke 23. 5.

¹¹ Luke 15. 11-32.

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use of satire,¹² challenging their imagination by the occasional hyperbolic putting of a great truth,¹³ showing a flash of wit¹⁴ or the aroused heat of anger¹⁵ at some great wrong. They found their expectation of religious reformation in Israel heightened by the words, the deeds, and the life of Jesus. They were also given authority to go out to preach and heal, that by actual *doing* they might get the full value of that which they had learned. Wonderful days were these which they spent with him. What were some of the things they learned?

God as Father. They got a new concept of God as their personal heavenly Father. Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures the concept of God is high, holy, and helpful. Occasionally he is spoken of as the father of the Israelitish nation: "I . . . called my son out of Egypt."¹⁶ Once or twice there is a hint to the believer that God may be known personally:

"Like as a father pitieth his children,
So Jehovah pitieth them that fear him."¹⁷

But the dominating idea seemed to be that God's Fatherly love was extended rather to Israel as a people than to the Israelites as individuals. But with Jesus things were changed. "If God doth so clothe the grass of the field, . . . shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"¹⁸ "Be not therefore anxious, . . . your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."¹⁹ "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father."²⁰ With these and many like words such as they had never before known, he taught the disciples to come into an intimate and personal relationship with the divine Father in heaven. Such a Father would be interested in having his children speak to him. A child of such a Father would find prayer the natural attitude of a loving son. If human fathers cared to give good gifts to their children, how much more would

¹² Matt. 23. 29.

¹³ Matt. 19. 24.

¹⁴ Matt. 23. 24.

¹⁵ Matt. 11. 17.

¹⁶ Hos. 11. 1.

¹⁷ Psa. 103. 13.

¹⁸ Matt. 6. 30.

¹⁹ Matt. 6. 31-32.

²⁰ Matt. 6. 9.

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the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit and all other good gifts to those who love him.²¹ Thus they came to walk the earth, not as orphans, nor even as followers afar off, but as sons and daughters in living company with a heavenly Father to whom they could speak at any time in the assurance that he heard, that he understood, and that he would answer.

The Kingdom. It was not a new thing to tell them that God would set up his kingdom on earth, but as Jesus talked about the Kingdom it came to have almost concrete significance. He assured them that this kingdom was soon to be set up.²² That it already had its beginning in their hearts and among their friends.²³ It is more than probable that they were looking for a kingdom which should be established by force of armies and which would be specially glorious to the Jews. They hoped, as we know, to have places of responsibility and power in this new kingdom.²⁴ Jesus turned their thoughts away from these selfish quests and tried to help them understand the greater things concerning the Kingdom: the good seed of the Kingdom was already being sown.²⁵ Some of it would never take root; some which did would be choked out or burned by the heat of the summer sun; but surely some would fall into good ground and would bring forth abundant fruit. The planting could not be in vain. Along with the Kingdom there would be the forces of evil struggling for mastery.²⁶ The Kingdom, having beginnings which were so small that he compared them to the mustard seed,²⁷ was to grow until it became a great tree. It was to be like leaven²⁸ in three measures of meal which would work until all were leavened. There would be good and bad together, but in the end bad should be rejected and the good treasured up.²⁹ This kingdom has a value so great that a man could well afford to lose everything else if only he might own it,³⁰ and God thought it of sufficient importance to invest the

²¹ Luke 11. 13.

²² Mark 9. 1.

²³ Luke 17. 21.

²⁴ Luke 22. 24.

²⁵ Matt. 13. 3ff.

²⁶ Matt. 13. 25ff.

²⁷ Matt. 13. 31ff.

²⁸ Matt. 13. 33.

²⁹ Matt. 13. 47-50.

³⁰ Matt. 13. 44.

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choicest gifts of heaven, even his heart's endeavor, to help bring it to pass.³¹ The Kingdom would triumph and the forces of evil must be ultimately rejected.

Brotherhood. The Kingdom was to have broader limits than these Jewish men at first knew. Jesus quite surprised them by including in its citizenship the Roman centurion, who had faith, the Syrophenician woman, the good Samaritan, the woman at the well, and other "sheep I have, which are not of" the Jewish fold.³² He taught them a lesson which was difficult then and is even yet difficult for us to learn fully—that all men are brothers. Of course their logic should have led them to that. If there was one God, and he a Father, then there could be only one family. And just as in a family one brother cares for another, so in the family of the heavenly Father, brother should care for brother. Jesus did what other teachers had failed to do. He set side by side in equal importance two great commands. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," and "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."³³

Human values. He taught them the value of each human being; and inasmuch as the value of the persons who were higher in rank seemed never to be called in question, he seemed to delight in singling out those who were usually regarded as of little or no importance: the poor, the widows, the children, the outcast, the sick. He suffered the little children to come unto him and forbade them not.³⁴ He observed the widow casting her two mites into the treasury and insisted that she had done more than all the others.³⁵ He invited himself to a feast at the home of the outcast Zacchæus.³⁶ Sinners and publicans flocked to his teaching,³⁷ and their rough voices and the smell of their sweaty garments did not turn him aside. He said that if anyone should cause one of these little ones which believed on him to stumble, it would be better if a millstone so huge that it had to be turned by a beast were hung about his neck and he were taken out and cast into the sea.³⁸ And

³¹ Matt. 13. 45.

³² John 10. 16.

³³ Mark 2. 30-31.

³⁴ Mark 10. 14.

³⁵ Mark 12. 43.

³⁶ Luke 19. 5.

³⁷ Luke 15. 1.

³⁸ Matt. 18. 6.

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in his great parable of the Last Judgment he said that the test of man's service to him, the King, would be whether or not he had been thoughtful and careful of those who were hungry, and thirsty, and vagabond, and naked, and imprisoned.³⁹

Human life and human rights, the value of one person, or, as we conventionally say, of one "soul," was the greatest value known to Jesus. This value was greater than that of any institution, however sacred. When the man born blind came to him for help,⁴⁰ or the man who had been thirty and eight years in his infirmity⁴¹ stretched out his hand to Jesus, notwithstanding that the tradition of the Jewish Church in which he had been reared would forbid him to make these cures on the Sabbath, the individual was greater than the institution, and when challenged he said: "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath."⁴²

The individual was greater than property values. How significant is the story of the Gadarene demoniac!⁴³ It cost many swine to cure that man, and in the thought of Jesus there was not an instant's delay. But when these villagers came out and saw their swine drowning in the sea, they forgot their friend who was sitting "clothed and in his right mind" at the feet of Jesus. They begged Jesus to go away—and he did. We smile at them, but is it not true that many children and many adults, even, lose their life, lose opportunities for intellectual and spiritual attainments, a culture which would make them most useful, for much less than the price of a few swine? Statute books of many a State contain more laws for the protection of live-stock than for guaranteeing the rights of children. Jesus tried, and must have measurably succeeded in teaching these men that there is no profit in the whole world which can balance the loss of any soul. The primacy of human personality dominates the gospel ethic.

Service. He taught them that the end of life is service⁴⁴ and that the service of God is expressed in deeds of helpful-

³⁹ Matt. 25. 31ff.

⁴⁰ John 9. 1-16.

⁴¹ John 5. 5, 9.

⁴² Mark 2. 27.

⁴³ Matt. 8. 28ff.

⁴⁴ Luke 22. 26.

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ness to men.⁴⁵ The old Oriental concept of royalty or majesty was that the king and his nobility could command the services of scores of men whose bodies and whose lives, if not their very souls, were subject to them. This whole teaching was reversed. "If any man would be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all."⁴⁶ The highest glory of God himself was seen in what he was doing for the world, and the glory of Jesus never shone more brightly than on that evening when, having laid aside his outer garments and girded himself with a towel, he washed the dusty and tired feet of his companions for the day.⁴⁷ The real measure of greatness, Jesus taught these disciples, is not the profit which you can get from others, but the service which you can give to others.

And he taught them that in living such a life they must not expect that it would of necessity be appreciated or remunerated. Those to whom kindness was done might crucify their benefactor. The servant need not expect to be above his lord.⁴⁸ Their good deeds, their honest endeavor, their living words and loving ministries were to be given, not in the hope of recompense in this world, but simply because they were disciples of one who spent his life in doing good and who interpreted to them the heart of the Father, "and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."⁴⁹ This lesson seems to have been well learned by the disciples, for, if tradition is correct, only one died a natural death. Of the others, one died by his own hand and ten suffered violent deaths for the sake of their Master.

Seedtime and harvest. He also taught them that the law of sacrifice was like the law of the seedtime. If a grain of corn falls into the ground, it springeth up and "beareth much fruit."⁵⁰ Jesus taught his disciples that they were fighting to win. In all his words there is not a whisper of defeat, and as his disciples of later days meditated often over the death of the Christ, they came to understand that what seemed at first to be dishonor and defeat was the greatest victory of his life. The final conquest of evil, the

⁴⁵ Matt. 25. 40.

⁴⁶ Mark 9. 35.

⁴⁷ John 13. 4ff.

⁴⁸ Matt. 10. 24-25.

⁴⁹ Matt. 5. 45.

⁵⁰ John 12. 24.

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ultimate establishment of a society upon earth in which the law of God shall be done, the ultimate compensation for all deeds of service and of sacrifice, will find its meaning in establishing the Kingdom. These disciples believed and were brave enough to set out upon their task. His followers still believe and look forward to the day for which we all pray—"Thy *kingdom* come, thy will be done *on earth*."

Finally he taught them that God's presence would be real to them in the days that were to come;⁵¹ that his going away would not leave them desolate, that the Spirit of the Most High would dwell in them, would teach them, would strengthen them, would console them, would direct them in times of difficulty, would hearten them in suffering, would shed abroad in their hearts the joy which could not be lost.⁵² The presence of God in their lives was to be an instant and vital reality.

It was such lessons as these that Jesus gave them in those brief days when he and they walked together. He did not fully succeed in teaching them all he desired, for they were faulty pupils, but when we consider the record of their work and the tree which grew from their planting, we shall have to conclude that he was not mistaken in his choice, disappointed in his teaching, nor defeated in his purpose through them.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Give the names of the twelve disciples.
2. What does the word "apostle" mean?
3. Who, other than the twelve, are called "apostles" in the New Testament?
4. What type of men did Jesus choose for his special missionaries?
5. How would you describe Jesus' method of teaching?
6. What new values did Jesus put into the idea of God as Father? of the Kingdom? of brotherhood? of human values? of greatness?

⁵¹ Matt. 28. 20.

⁵² Matt. 11. 28-30.

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Could not Jesus have done better by choosing the twelve from the schools rather than from active life?
2. Is there a certain bigotry of learning which makes it inclined to be slow to accept ideas from those outside its own group?
3. Are the teachings given the twelve to be considered as *new* or as made to have new meaning by Jesus' emphasis?
4. Might a study of Jesus' teaching method give valuable suggestions for the educational program of our day? If so, what?
5. Who may be regarded as leaders among the twelve? How was leadership determined?
6. Could Jesus have made as great an appeal if he had not performed the marvelous works?

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CHAPTER III

BEGINNINGS IN JERUSALEM

An unexpected starting place. We hardly should have expected a Christian Church to make its beginning in Jerusalem. Jesus was an infrequent visitor there. Of the first three Gospels each tells of only one visit by him to the capital city during his ministry. The fourth Gospel makes mention of three visits, none of them long. The greater freedom of the life in Galilee gave better opportunity both for teaching and the hearing of such words as Jesus had to speak. None of the apostles were pure Jerusalemites. Some have thought that possibly Judas Iscariot may have been. Others have conjectured that John, the brother of James, was well acquainted in Jerusalem. But it is doubtful if any one of these men had a permanent residence there or would have counted himself as a citizen of the place. It seems strange that the disciples should have tarried among people and in an environment which had been so hostile to their great leader. The Jerusalem Jews had dogged his steps to find fault with him. They had argued, trying to catch him in his words.¹ They had finally trumped up false charges² and secured his crucifixion under the direction of the procurator, Pontius Pilate, forcing an unwilling Roman ruler to do their will³ for fear of being discounted by his emperor for allowing the mobs and rioting which would have followed a refusal to grant their request. Moreover, according to Matthew,⁴ one of Jesus' last words was to tell them that they should go into Galilee where they should meet him. The fourth Gospel records⁵ that Peter had returned, for the time at least, to his fishing and the other disciples were working with him when, according to appointment, Jesus met them on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias.

¹ Matt. 22. 15.

⁴ Matt. 28. 10.

² Matt. 26. 60.

⁵ John 21. 1-5.

³ Luke 23. 4-7, 14-23.

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Yet they did actually wait in Jerusalem. The statement of Acts⁶ is corroborated by the independent evidence of Paul⁷ that the disciples were there and at the head of things in the days of the beginning of the Christian Church.

Why at Jerusalem? There were reasons for their choosing Jerusalem. In the first place, there was the hope, doubtless held by all the disciples, of an almost immediate personal return of Jesus to set up the Kingdom on earth.⁸ This expectation was at its very height in those days when the disciples conversed with Jesus previous to his going away. According to Acts,⁹ the last question asked him was, "Dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Doubtless while their concept of the Kingdom included the reign of righteousness and the establishment of a society in which the law of God should be done on earth, it was also associated in their minds with a more or less complete political organization. This organization would be related intimately with the history of the Jewish nation and would take over and preserve those elements of value in Jewish life. Jerusalem was the center of the worship of Jehovah as they knew it, and Jerusalem would be the place to which their Lord would return and where he would set up his throne and reign in righteousness. They were to wait for him. They were to wait also for a new religious impulse which was to come in an extraordinary gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in the power of the Divine Spirit and in the glory of a returned Messiah, the new Christian era was expected to begin. They were disappointed in their expectations of a visible return of Jesus, but the impulse of the spiritual gift was so great as to minimize any regret they may have had in not seeing the risen Jesus return on the clouds. At any rate, they probably said, "The time is short and he will not long delay his coming." This subject continues to our day to be a debated question. Some are certain that the bodily appearing did not happen, and that is the end of the matter for them. Others insist that the "coming" was to be spiritual, as presented in John, and feel that the early church was not mistaken in the

⁶ Acts 1. 13.

⁷ Gal. 1. 17, 19.

⁸ Acts 3. 20.

⁹ Acts 1. 6.

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fact of Jesus' coming, but only in the *manner* of this presence.

The Day of the Lord. The Christian Church had its birthday on Pentecost. The gift of the Spirit which came to the disciples was to them not only an evidence of the power and the presence of God, but it carried with it such confidence and such optimism regarding the work of the Kingdom that a multitude were attracted at once.¹⁰ How could it be otherwise? The Jewish people had for more than a century looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, to the ushering in of a spiritual kingdom of the highest possible ethical achievement, along with the conquest of the world to their God-given standards. The time so long anticipated and so eagerly looked forward to had come.¹¹ This was the "Great Day of the Lord"; and at the time of their harvest festival, the season of the ingathering, they started to garner in the Jewish nation.

Charter members. No church ever had a more promising initial membership. From among the multitudes who had been attracted to the teaching of Jesus and who had followed him with more or less faithfulness during the period of his ministry one hundred and twenty¹² had been waiting together. They represented the most earnest, devout, and believing of all the earthly disciples of Jesus. Then there had come up to Jerusalem from "every nation under heaven"¹³ devout Jews, sufficiently reverent to desire a visit to the Temple, self-sacrificing enough to meet the expenses of a long trip, having heroism to attempt the dangers and discomforts of such a journey, religiously responsive enough at once to embrace new teaching concerning the Messiah as it was set forth by Peter, and with strength of will definitely to attach themselves to the new company and to set about helping bring in the new order. Three thousand¹⁴ such persons were gained on the first day. It was not an ordinary street mob to which Peter preached. It was to a selected group of the choicest religious spirits whom the world knew. So his message carried

¹⁰ Acts 2. 38.

¹³ Acts 2. 5.

¹¹ Acts 2. 16.

¹⁴ Acts 2. 41.

¹² Acts 1. 15

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conviction and led to action. The group was enlarged to five thousand¹⁵ men within a few days and there were added day by day "such as were being saved." We note with interest the development of the early features of church life and work.

A teaching group. The twelve, whose number had been completed by the addition of Matthias, were persons whose pre-eminence would be recognized at once. By common consent they had spiritual leadership in this new and comparatively unorganized group. The apostles led them to the Temple.¹⁶ When in times of persecution they were called to defend themselves, it was the apostle who spoke for the company,¹⁷ and the apostles themselves being intrusted with responsibility insisted they should be relieved from other care and should have opportunity to give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.¹⁸ Later the teaching group was enlarged by the emergence of certain outstanding personalities among those who had been appointed as helpers in charge of the alms of the community, and by the bringing into service of such men as Barnabas and Saul, who are both referred to as "apostles," although strictly they did not belong in the group of those who had companied with Jesus and gone in and out among his followers during his life.¹⁹ Later the church provided itself with other leaders who were known as prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, bishops, deacons, and such like, these workers being added as the need of the growing community required.

Baptism. Ceremonial washing was nothing new to the Jew. When John the Baptist and Jesus provided that baptism should be the outward evidence of enlistment for the kingdom of heaven, it probably caused no curiosity among those to whom it came. So when Peter required of the believers on Pentecost "Repent ye, and be baptized,"²⁰ he was following the beginnings made by Jesus and John before him. There has been a very great deal of discussion concerning the mode of administering this baptism, but

¹⁵ Acts 4. 4.

¹⁶ Acts 3. 1.

¹⁷ Acts 4. 5-8.

¹⁸ Acts 6. 2-4.

¹⁹ Acts 1. 21.

²⁰ Acts 2. 38.

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among the apostles this seems not to have been discussed. Baptism was primarily a confession rather than a mode.

Just what form of words was used we do not know. We know that in Ephesus²¹ there were some who had been baptized "into John's baptism," and that they, being re-baptized, were baptized "into the name of the Lord Jesus." By the second century of the Christian era, however, the church generally had come to use the formula set forth in the Great Commission:²² "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This simple public testimony by baptism, approached by a careful period of preparation, and enshrined in a significant ritual, has now come to be one of the great "ordinances" of the Christian Church.

The sacramental meal. From the days of the Jewish Passover they had been accustomed to eat together a meal which had very great religious significance. Jesus had made a specially significant occasion of the last Passover²³ he ate with his followers. To the disciples at Emmaus, Jesus was made known in the breaking of bread.²⁴ Nothing could be more natural or more fitting than for these Jewish Christians to take over an observance which was sacred in their own nation, combine it with the memory of Jesus' last meal with them before his death and with his first appearance to them after his death, and make each meal a sacramental one. It is possible that these early Christians never partook of food that they did not in some sense remember that it symbolized their Lord's body and blood. Thus, often, did they eat their bread together,²⁵ calling to mind at each service the sacred memories which surrounded the Jewish Passover and the Christian memorial as well. These "love feasts" were a permanent feature of the early Christian worship. By reason of the abundance of the food and drink in some churches they came to be a means of offense rather than a help. In the Corinthian church Paul complained²⁶ that those who came first ate and drank too much and that those who came later had nothing.

²¹ Acts 19. 3-5.

²² Matt. 28. 20.

²³ Matt. 26. 26-29.

²⁴ Luke 24. 30-31

²⁵ Acts 2. 42.

²⁶ 1 Cor. 11. 20-34.

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Moreover, those who had partaken so liberally became drunken and the whole Christian cause was being brought into disrepute by this excess. So he gave direction that they should first eat and drink at home, and when they came together should take merely enough food and drink to remind them of the broken body and of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus. This seems to have become the general practice. Thus there was developed in the Christian Church that great observance which has from its earliest days until now called to mind the sufferings of Jesus on the behalf of others, and which has been a means of fellowship both with him and with each other.

The Scriptures. In connection with the Temple service and with the work of the apostles, there was another help to devotion which must not be overlooked. They possessed the Scriptures of the Old Testament. To those who in this day think of the Old Testament as of little use, it should be remarked that it was the only Bible which Jesus or Paul had, and that in these holy writings, which had caught up and treasured the history, the philosophy, the political, the economic, the moral and ethical teachings of the Jewish nation, they found words of God. The progress of the new Christian movement was in part accounted for by this body of religious literature which was theirs at the very beginning. Then the Epistles of Paul were collected; in time certain collections of the sayings of Jesus were added; and later there was finally developed what we now know as the New Testament. But it must be remembered that our New Testament had its roots in the Old, and that probably, with one or two exceptions, the whole of the New Testament was written by persons who had their early teaching in the Jewish synagogues.

Meetings for prayer. In addition to the formal services of the Temple, there were held, probably often following the love feasts, informal services of prayer. It may be that these were by regular appointment. Probably they occurred almost daily. A study of the Acts cannot but impress us that this church gave itself much to prayer. When the gift of the Spirit came upon the one hundred and twenty they were probably in prayer. When Peter

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and John healed the lame man,²⁷ they were on their way to a service of prayer. Peter was imprisoned and the angel led him forth; when he arrived at his own company,²⁸ they had been in prayer for him. When Peter and John were arrested, the church gave itself to prayer that they might be delivered.²⁹ When the seven helpers were chosen, they were solemnly set apart with prayer³⁰ and the laying on of hands. When the Samaritan church was in need of the Spirit,³¹ the disciples prayed for them. In the Cornelius story,³² a praying proselyte is brought into contact with a praying apostle. Thus, throughout the story, prayer seems to have been as truly a part of their daily life as the taking of food.

The Spirit's presence. The most outstanding feature of the life of the early church was its recognition of the presence and power of the Divine Spirit. This too was not a new concept. The Spirit had certainly not been absent from the church of the rulers and prophets of Israel. Nor was it unprecedented that the Spirit of God should so come upon men as to cause a form of ecstasy, for such cases are recorded in the Old Testament. But the new feature here, according to the Acts, was that in these days there should be poured out upon *all* the believers an extraordinary manifestation of the Spirit. Peter, quoting from Joel, called their attention to this:

“And it shall be in the last days, saith God,
I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh:
And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
And your young men shall see visions,
And your old men shall dream dreams:
Yea, and on my servants and on my handmaidens in
those days
Will I pour forth of my Spirit; and they shall proph-
esy.”³³

The one hundred and twenty were aroused by the Spirit.

²⁷ Acts 3. 1.

²⁸ Acts 12. 5, 12.

²⁹ Acts 4. 24.

³⁰ Acts 6. 6.

³¹ Acts 10. 4.

³² Acts 8. 15.

³³ Acts 2. 17-18.

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When the church later were in prayer together, the Holy Spirit came upon the whole group as at the beginning.³⁴ Peter's discourse before the Sanhedrin³⁵ was in the power of the Spirit.³⁶ Stephen answered his accusers in the power of the Spirit.³⁷ The church of Samaria received this Spirit by the prayers of the apostles.³⁸ Upon the household of Cornelius the Spirit fell as upon the original group at Jerusalem.³⁹ So we find in this new group the confident belief and realization of an extraordinary presence of God as evidenced by the Spirit's power among them. Without this belief in the reality of Divine Presence and authority they probably could never have carried forward that wonderful work which made the beginnings of the Christian Church. The Gospels have been termed "The Acts of Jesus"; the Acts has been called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit."

Money; whose is it? One question which almost immediately presented itself for solution was that of property. The church included among its membership a large number of poor. It had also certain rich men. Some adjustment needed to be made whereby the poor should not have any lack. Barnabas, a Cypriote Jew who had considerable property, led off, selling all he had and giving it to the apostles for distribution.⁴⁰ Others followed his very generous example. Doubtless there were many who gave a part of their possessions.⁴¹ There was one sad instance in which a man and his wife planned to give a part and to get credit for giving the whole. The hot anger of the early church against the lying hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira is but one evidence of the tremendous ethical values attached to the religion of the early church.⁴² The doctrine of property seemed to be: That everything by right belongs to God;⁴³ that men are intrusted by God with this property as stewards; that the⁴⁴ evangelized con-

³⁴ Acts 4. 31.

³⁵ Acts 4. 8.

³⁶ Acts 5. 9.

³⁷ Acts 6. 10.

³⁸ Acts 8. 17.

³⁹ Acts 10. 44.

⁴⁰ Acts 4. 36.

⁴¹ Acts 4. 34.

⁴² Acts 5. 4.

⁴³ Acts 4. 32-35.

⁴⁴ Acts 5. 4.

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science rather than legal or ecclesiastical compulsion should determine just how and when this property should be used.

The first giving of alms. In connection with the question of property rose a complaint on the part of the Grecian Christians that their widows had not been properly considered in the daily distribution of alms to the needy.⁴⁵ The ledge on which the new ship would strike, and sink if it sank at all, was the old race prejudice between Jew and Gentile. At first the tides of love were full and high and were sufficient to carry the church across this danger. But when it did appear, the solution was the election by the church and the appointment by the apostles of seven men whose duty it should be to have care over the business interests of this growing community.⁴⁶ This first official benevolence is worthy of notice. The widow has always been peculiarly typical of the needy poor; advanced in age, without the help of her husband, frequently separated from her children, and having little or no means of her own, she has been a care to the church in every age. By the time of the writing of the first Epistle to Timothy there had developed in the church a class of almoners officially known as "widows" who served as helpers and who were in turn supported by the church. Direction was given for their maintenance and for discrimination between those who should be "enrolled"⁴⁷ and those who should not be. Aside from the recognition of the duty of the church toward those who were positively in need, there was also the statement that those who had poor kinsfolk must provide for their own, and specially of their own household, and that if they did not do so, they had "denied the faith" and were "worse than an unbeliever."⁴⁸ The minimum age at which such a widow could be enrolled was sixty years. Thus did the early church make provision for its needy and guard itself against imposition by those who would attach themselves as "rice Christians" to the new movement.

Doctrine. Along with the growth of their community life and the development of their business plans, there was the emergence of certain theological points of view.

⁴⁵ Acts 6. 1.

⁴⁶ Acts 6. 3.

⁴⁷ 1 Tim. 5. 9.

⁴⁸ 1 Tim. 5. 8.

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Doubtless the apostles who were recognized as the teachers of the church held to the current Jewish and prophetic ideals of God, of man, of immortality. But there were certain questions which needed to be answered for the sake of their new message. The Messiah had generally been thought of in terms of glory and not of shame. How did it come, then, that he who was the Messiah had *suffered* so shamelessly at the hands of his opponents and died the most ignominious death known even to the Roman government, with all its refinement of cruelty? If he was to be Master, then why had he thus been mastered? Their answer was a three-fold one. In the first place, it was a part of the plan of God that he should violently die.⁴⁹ Moreover, those who had delivered him to death, although carrying out the plan of God, were nothing less than murderers and deniers of the Holy One.⁵⁰ Further, God planned that his righteous Servant should not see corruption; and by raising Jesus from the dead, God had designated him as Messiah.⁵¹ There seems to have been the thought that during his earthly ministry his Messiahship was potential only, and that it was made to be actual and effective by his resurrection from the dead.

The life of the church, the spiritual victories so manifest in this early community, were evidences of the Messiahship of Jesus. Every new manifestation of the Spirit⁵² was a trumpet call to the Jew of Messianic faith to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah and take his place in the new order. The Pauline theology of the "propitiatory" work of the death of Jesus does not appear in the early chapters of the Acts, but appears in the more fully developed thinking of the church as it made its progress through the Jewish out into the Gentile world.

Thus we see that many of the institutions and practices of our present church had their beginnings in this Jerusalem congregation. As the years have passed and new conditions have arisen, certain features have disappeared. In some, enlargements have been made; they have been more fully developed and more adequately established. The insti-

⁴⁹ Acts 2. 23.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Acts 2. 30-36.

⁵² Acts 2. 33.

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tutions of the church have been developed from such beginnings rather than fully, completely, and unchangeably ordained at the beginning. And the glory of the Christian Church is, that, as new conditions arise, under the leadership of the Divine Spirit the church will be enabled to make such changes as will make its message effective for each succeeding age. Thus will the present church continue to be "apostolic" in the best sense. The apostolic church is not necessarily one which attempts to reproduce either the formal institutions or the exact observances of the first few years of the history of the church. Rather the apostolic church of to-day is the one which can so adapt its work and fit its message to the age in which it lives that it may become fully useful in its day.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Why did the early followers of Jesus remain at Jerusalem?
2. What was the significance of the feast of Pentecost?
3. What groups constituted the first membership of the church?
4. Why would the twelve naturally become the first teachers in the church?
5. What other leaders and officers did the early church have?
6. What was the significance of baptism?
7. Tell of the growth in the observance of the memorial meal.
8. What may we say of the use of the Old Testament in the Jerusalem church?
9. Tell of the use of prayer in the early church.
10. What was the belief of the early church regarding the Holy Spirit?
11. What two incidents have to do with the use of money?
12. What was the first benevolent undertaking of the church?
13. Tell of the development of belief in Jesus as Messiah.

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. "In Peter's time three thousand were converted under one sermon; now it takes three thousand sermons to convert one soul." Is this epigram a fair statement? Give reason for your answer.

2. Can you think of a more effective way of confessing a life-purpose than by public baptism? If so, what would it be?

3. Is it possible to express in such symbols as the Lord's Supper and baptism thoughts which lie "too deep for words"?

4. Is there any unchangeable, divinely and permanently revealed plan for church organization? If not, why not?

5. How do the ideals of this earliest Christian Church compare with those of the one of which we are members?

6. Ought the government, the rules, the doctrine of our church to be changed in any way? If so, how?

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CHAPTER IV

GOING TO THE GENTILES

Why so slow? It is difficult to explain why the early church moved so haltingly in the direction of the Gentile. To our modern Christian, with his long line of antecedent missionary Christianity, those Jerusalem Christians seem to have been unpardonably slow. The going out from Jerusalem, according to the Acts,¹ came only when persecution forced it out; and after a beginning had been made among the non-Jews there was little enthusiasm, and in some quarters even heated opposition. In view of this fact some have questioned the universal outlook of Jesus himself.

Universal aspects of Jesus. There are very many arguments to show that Jesus did not expect the proclamation of his good news to be limited to the Jews. His devotion to the spirit of Old Testament prophecy would include belief in such universal ideals as appear in Amos, in Isaiah, and in Jonah. His place in a nation which was given to proselytizing, as we know the Jews to have been, would help shape his outlook. His teachings seem to be entirely free from national limitations: the parables—the sower, the mustard seed, the pearl of great price, the good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the Last Judgment—are not limited in scope; his principles—God is Father, man is brother, love is the supreme motive, faith the supreme attitude, service the supreme end—such as these certainly are world-wide in their application. His sympathy with those whom the Jewish religionists disliked—Samaritans, publicans, Syrophenicians and Greeks—showed a new attitude. His use of the illustration of the new wine and the old wine-skins seems to indicate that he knew that his teaching would need to find its most fertile field elsewhere than in his own great group. His story of the host who would

¹ Acts 8. 1, 4.

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have his table full, and who would go to the highways and hedges to secure a sufficient number of guests, points to anything but a narrow Jewish outlook. So it seems clear that the trend of Jesus' teaching and ministry was such that it would not warrant neglect of the Gentile world.

Suggested reasons for delay. There can be no doubt that the early Jerusalem Christians had a very much shortened perspective, that they expected Jesus to return very soon, and that believing this as they did, they could see no need of launching out upon missionary work until the new advent. This task was conceived rather in terms of preparing Israel for the triumphant coming of its Messiah than of going to the Gentiles.

Then there was, doubtless, that sense of racial superiority which made them regard their own group as most important and led to the belief which we shall later study that the Gentile world would have to come into the Kingdom through the Jewish portal—by becoming, in short, as these early Christians were.

To understand these early leaders, we have only to consider our racial complexes and to remember the leisurely progress we have made toward introducing Jesus to those of other races and cultures. They were truly good people—but good people who still had wrong opinions and well-established, possibly unconscious, controlling prejudices.

The first move. The place to begin was their own group. There were racial differences in the church itself. The Jerusalem Christians were accused of giving first consideration to the needs of the widows of Palestinian origin, leaving to those of the Dispersion a less desirable portion.² When we consider the provisions for white children and for those of Negroes in the schools of any American city, we can easily understand how unthinkingly such discrimination might take place. Those who were wronged made complaint, and at once the apostles, being good men, asked the church to select seven helpers from among their number who should have the whole care of the distribution of alms. When the choice was made, the entire list were men with

² Acts 6. 1.

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Gentile names.³ These persons were approved by the apostles and solemnly consecrated to their important work. Thus we have the first move in the Christian Church toward the abolishment of racial discrimination.

But these persons of Gentile origin had come into Christianity through the synagogue, and the process of assimilation was not so difficult. We come now to a movement farther from the center.

The Samaritans. Philip, the helper, in being driven from Jerusalem, fled to the north and west and came into Samaria. Having come, he told the Samaritans of Jesus, the Christ. They too were looking for a Messiah, and they believed.⁴ Who were these Samaritans? They were the descendants of a mixed race. When very many of the people of the Northern Kingdom were carried into captivity, their conquerors, the Assyrians, repopulated the land with foreigners who brought their own gods. The presence of the strange gods was thought to have aroused the anger of the Deity of the land, and so a captive Hebrew priest was sent to teach them how to fear Jehovah. There thus grew up a mongrel religion, the remnant of which may still be seen on Mount Gerizim. Upon the return of the Jews the Samaritans offered to assist in the rebuilding of Jerusalem; their offer was refused and they were even excluded from the right to worship in Jerusalem. They then attempted to prevent the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and continued strife and consequent hatred persisted. Their worship was partly Jewish. Perhaps the close resemblance was an added source of friction. There was also an admixture of Jewish blood. The feeling of the disciples toward these people may be understood when it is remembered that when they were going with Jesus toward Jerusalem, and passing through Samaria were denied hospitality, they quickly suggested calling down fire from heaven.⁵ The lawyer to whom was given the parable of the good Samaritan, when asked, "Which of these three, thinkest thou,

³ Acts 6. 5.

⁴ Acts 8. 4-8.

⁵ Luke 9. 51-55.

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proved neighbor unto him?" would not say "The Samaritan," as we should naturally expect, but answered,⁶ "He that showed mercy on him."

They became believers. Now, it was this group who had received the Good News, accepted Jesus as Messiah, and who were gladly rejoicing in their new-found light and power. Even Elymas, the "soothsayer," was considering adding the preaching of this new word to the other tricks by which he made his living. It will take a lively use of the imagination to sense the feeling of the Jerusalem Christians. The Samaritans, of all people in the world! But something had to be done, and the church sent, unsolicited so far as we know, a committee of inquiry to see about it—no less persons than Peter and John. It must have been with some anxiety that they went about their task. When they arrived they saw the evidences of the Divine Presence, and being good men, set their prejudices aside and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, which prayer was answered upon the imposition of the apostles' hands. So pleased were they that they took part in further preaching among the Samaritan villages.⁷ We cannot help wondering, however, what would have happened had the Samaritans all decided to come to Jerusalem and attend one of the love feasts there! And, of course, the Samaritans were not *pure* Gentiles, for they had Jewish blood, practiced circumcision, and also used the Pentateuch, or first five books of the Old Testament, for their Scripture.

Peter's vision. The next step was taken by Peter. He was encouraging the Jewish Christians in Lydda and Joppa. While staying in the home of Simon the tanner, in Joppa, he had a strange vision. Being upon the housetop, about meal-time, and being hungry (we wonder if bodily conditions suggested the form of the vision!) he saw a sheet let down from heaven by the corners, full of "all manner of four-footed beasts and creeping things of the earth and birds of the heaven."⁸ Such things were ceremonially unclean to any well-instructed Jew.⁹ He

⁶ Luke 10. 36-37.

⁸ Acts 10. 9-12.

⁷ Acts 9. 14-20.

⁹ Lev. 11. 1-47.

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was bidden to "rise, kill, and eat." With heat he responded, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common and unclean."¹⁰ The answer came, "What God hath cleansed, make not thou common." The vision and the command came thrice and then ceased. While Peter wondered concerning the vision, there came a detail of men from a Roman centurion of Cæsarea, Cornelius by name, asking for Peter, and requesting that he come that Cornelius might "hear words" from Peter.

The "God-fearers." The man assured Peter that Cornelius was a "righteous man and one that feareth God, and well reported of by all the nation of the Jews."¹¹ This brings to our attention a group who seem to have been the bridge over which Christianity passed from Jew to Gentile. The synagogues welcomed to their services such Gentiles as came to learn, and many of these became sincere followers of the moral law, hesitating, however, to submit to circumcision, to the troublesome discrimination as between clean and unclean—in short, they did not care to adopt the Jewish ritual requirements. So they were called "God-fearers,"¹² or semi-proselytes. It is interesting to note the stages by which Peter is made willing to admit such a one to the privileges of the gospel: first there was a divine vision—thrice repeated; then he took with him "certain of the brethren" from Joppa. There was the duplication of the ecstatic experiences of Pentecost—and then Peter, turning to the brethren who were with him, asked, confusedly,¹³ "Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?" And although we are told that "they of the circumcision that believed were amazed, . . . because that on the Gentiles also was poured the gift of the Holy Spirit," there seems to have been no objection, for Peter "commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ."¹⁴ It all seems clear to us now, but for them it was the beginning of a revolution! What was to become of the idea of Israel as a chosen nation, if Gentiles could

¹⁰ Acts 10. 14

¹³ Acts 10. 47.

¹¹ Acts 10. 22.

¹⁴ Acts 10. 48.

¹² Acts 10. 22; 13. 16, 43; 16. 14; 17. 4.

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thus, ignoring the whole Jewish order, take a short cut into the Kingdom? There were thousands of such "God-fearers," and they eagerly flocked into the church. We shall see in a later chapter (VI) the struggle which ensued.

Peter Rebuked. When Peter returned to Jerusalem the news had preceded him. At once "they that were of the circumcision"¹⁵ contended with him, saying, "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them." Here we have an added touch—he had *eaten with Gentiles*. But they were brother Christians. The ceremonial law forbade it, the law of love encouraged it! He had thought to keep both laws—but how? At any rate, he recounted the whole story and seems to have quieted their opposition, for they "glorified God" and said, "Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life."¹⁶ They were moving toward a type of Christianity which was universal.

There was, for a time, no great conflict, as the Samaritan Christians probably worshiped in their own group and the new Christians at Cæsarea seem to have been of the household of Cornelius only. What would happen when Gentile and Jewish Christians should be in the same congregation? The next step brings us to this.

The Word in Antioch. "They therefore that were scattered abroad . . . travelled as far as Phœnicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to none save only to Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. . . . And a great number that believed turned unto the Lord."¹⁷ Now, note what happened: "And the report concerning them came to the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth (so far as we can see, this delegation was unsolicited) Barnabas." The church at Jerusalem must have been in a whirl: so many Gentiles coming in, and here Gentile and Jew mingling together, probably having social fellowship, and even eating and drinking together! The parent church obviously wished to control

¹⁵ Acts 11. 2.

¹⁶ Acts 11. 18.

¹⁷ Acts 11. 19-22.

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the new movement if possible. But Barnabas was an open-minded Christian. Having grown up among the Dispersion, he was probably more generously disposed toward the non-Jew than some of his Palestinian brethren. So when he came and saw the "grace of God" he was glad ¹⁸ and urged them to *keep right on*. In the meanwhile he went to find another Jewish Christian of the Dispersion, a Tarsian by the name of Saul, who having become a Christian, had been driven, both by the hostility of his Jewish kinsmen and by the Spirit, into the field of Cilicia. Having found him he brought him to Antioch and together they set up a new center of the gospel where for a whole year they "gathered together with the church, and taught much people."

The name "Christian." It was here, in this Gentile city and separated from the mother church, that the group who acknowledged Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah came to separate self-consciousness as a movement. Until now they had been a sect of the Jews—called by various names—simply "believers" or "Nazarenes" or "The Way," but here first they were called *Christians*. Many think that the name was at first given as a term of derision—they were "little Christs." Some think they came by it naturally, as those whose preaching was about the Christ. In any case, it was in this new and free center that the name destined to stand for centuries was first used.

The first missionaries. In such a church there would be no racial limits to the gospel. Doubtless Barnabas had been wishing that his kinsmen in Cyprus might hear the Good News and probably Paul had been looking with longing eyes toward the other parts of Asia Minor. While the church was at prayer the Spirit moved them, and they *sent out* their two beloved leaders to evangelize the regions outside of Antioch. Up to this time the spread of the gospel seems to have been accidental or at most only incidental. Here it became purposive. Before studying the further enlargement, we must first study him who became the new leader of the Christian movement.

¹⁸ Acts 11. 23.

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QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. What was the occasion of the first preaching to the Gentiles?
2. What are the arguments to show that Jesus had a universal outlook?
3. What are some of the suggested reasons for the delay of the early church in preaching to the Gentiles?
4. What was the problem which first presented racial difficulties, and how was it settled?
5. Who were the Samaritans and what was the conventional Jewish attitude toward them?
6. Tell of the way in which Samaria was evangelized.
7. Tell the story of Peter's going to Cornelius, and of the conversion of that household.
8. Why was Peter rebuked by his brethren in Jerusalem?
9. Tell of the progress of the gospel in Antioch.
10. In what respect does each of these stories—the Samaritans, Cornelius, and the church at Antioch—present a different aspect of the movement toward the Gentiles?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the implications of the belief in one God who is Father upon the idea of a world-wide religion?
2. Why are modern Christians so slow to put off race-prejudice?
3. What are the causes of modern race-prejudice? Can it be eliminated?
4. How would we feel if our church should attract so many foreigners, or persons of some different race, that we were clearly to be a minority?
5. Was it the Gentile or the Jewish-Christian movement which ultimately reached our ancestors, and through them, us? What difference, if any, has that made in our creeds or worship?
6. What is the greatest present-day hindrance to world sympathy—to world Christianity?

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CHAPTER V

PAUL THE NEW LEADER

His antecedents. It was no small matter that the greatest leader of the apostolic church came to his tasks with advantages such as were given by the ancestry, the environment and training of Paul. Looking back upon his own lineage, he regarded it as nothing less than providential; "When it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me, *even* from my mother's womb, and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me."¹ His Jewish inheritance and teaching, the broadening influences of the Græco-Roman world, the dignity of Roman citizenship, the culture of the school of Gamaliel, the passionate care for righteousness, and inflexible determination to serve God—these came to Paul through his inheritance from the past and from his environment.

A "Hebrew of Hebrews." Many people of our own day have pride in their ancestry. It is worth while to be able to trace one's origin to Plymouth Rock or to New Amsterdam, or to be enrolled among the Daughters of the American Revolution. There is something in "blood," and it is not a mere bit of snobbery to be able to say that one belongs to one of the "oldest and best families" in America. Paul could trace his ancestry back to Abraham. He was of the proudest race of antiquity, one which believed itself called of God to the accomplishment of the divine purpose, and a race which always took itself so seriously that it could not be mediocre or weak. More than this, he was a "Hebrew of Hebrews,"² which probably means that there was no admixture of Gentile stock. On the side both of his father and his mother he was a true thoroughbred. Then he was of the tribe of Benjamin, from which came the first king of Israel, that noble young fellow who stood head

¹ Gal. 1. 15-16.

² Philip. 3. 5.

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and shoulders above all his compatriots, and who began his reign with such modesty and vigor. Our hero³ was named for Saul.

A Pharisee. Among the Jews he was a Pharisee. This meant that he belonged to the group who were most patriotically religious, who banded themselves together to withstand the surrender of the Jewish people to Greek influences in the days of the Maccabees, and who gave the moral stimulus which made possible the wars leading to the Jewish independence. When hard times came upon them, and the Roman yoke was put upon their necks, the Pharisees never acknowledged its right to be there and paid their tribute under protest. They were the theological progressives of their day. They believed in the resurrection, in angels, in spirits, and in the world to come, all of which were comparatively new ideas in Jewish theological thinking. They practiced the most rigid care to keep themselves unspotted from the world. It was in this regard that they went to extremes and there grew up among them some who were so meticulously scrupulous as to bring upon their heads the condemnation of Jesus which we find in Matthew 23. It was against this group, and not against *all* Pharisees, that the woes were pronounced. It is probable that Matthew has followed his custom here, and grouped a number of the traditional sayings of Jesus together. The Pharisee was in many respects the highest product of the Jewish civilization up to this time.

A Jew of the Dispersion. Paul came from Tarsus.³ Already in a previous chapter we have noticed how the Jews had been scattered throughout the civilized world. They could not all have lived in Palestine had they desired, and many of them were so successful as business men and traders in the fields to which they had been carried that they had little desire to return to the Holy Land excepting for the periodical religious feasts. They paid of their money to the maintenance of the Temple service and in aid of the poor who were in Jerusalem, but they themselves were more adventurous and independent in spirit than

³ Acts 23. 3.

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the Palestinian Jews. They were also more generous in their appreciation of the Gentile world. The Jews of Palestine, particularly of Jerusalem, living under the shadow of their own great institutions, came to disregard, or even to despise the Gentiles who were so different from themselves. Having very little to do with them, they did not recognize their worth. But the Jews of the Dispersion, mingling in friendly fellowship of business, in school and in traveling, knew the worth of a man simply because he was a man, and did not place the measuring-stick of religious observance upon every individual. That Paul's parents should have been in Tarsus, and that his early youth should have been spent in this city which was renowned both for its commerce and its education, meant much to the development of a type of missionary who could be effective in the Gentile world.

The Roman citizen. Even in these days of exaggerated nationalism, when every man thinks more exclusively of his own country than he ought, we do not arise to the full sense of dignity which was carried in the words, "I am a Roman."⁴ The Roman empire really embraced the whole civilized world, as they supposed. It is true there were certain fringes on the margin as yet unconquered, but Rome ruled the Mediterranean, and the chief civilization of the world gathered around that great sea. Roman citizenship was not at all a universal privilege. It could be acquired by a gift of the emperor or by birth. It carried with it certain privileges which were not common to all men; as, trial by the Roman courts when suspected of crime, complete freedom from dishonorable punishment of every kind, such as scourging and crucifixion, and the right of appeal to the emperor. A Roman citizen was by the very fact of his citizenship a superior man, and if, as in the case of Paul, he appreciated his privileges, it made him to be a better man.

Thoroughly and liberally educated. Paul was directed by his parents, we may suppose, to enter the field of teaching. In other words, he was to become a rabbi. This

⁴ Acts 22. 25.

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involved probably twelve consecutive years of training in the rabbinical schools of Jerusalem. At the end of this time he must have thoroughly understood the history and literature of his own great race. He must have known its principles and its aspirations. The work was in large part memorized, as the Jewish ideal for a rabbinical student was that his mind should be as a "well-plastered cistern," so that nothing going in should ever be lost. Paul was particularly fortunate in that his teacher was the great Gamaliel.⁵ He belonged to the more generous school of interpretation among the Jews. There is some dispute as to whether or not he actually taught his students the Greek classics, but he was at least friendly toward those fields of learning. He is said to have been surrounded by a multitude of young men. So Paul was one among several hundred who waited upon his words, and at the end of his course he came forth fully trained in rabbinical lore. There is much in his life to show this training. His Pharisaic zeal for God is characteristic of Jewish tradition, as well as of the Old Testament. His allegorizing of the story of Hagar,⁶ his "rock that followed,"⁷ and his insistence upon "seed," and not "seeds,"⁸ are illustrative of the rabbinical type of thought.

A fervent spirit. Much has been said of the zeal with which Paul undertook his work. It is certain that he gave himself with great vigor to whatever task he had in hand, whether it was persecuting the Christians even to death,⁹ or presenting his missionary message. He could not quietly sit by and believe that things would "work out some way." It was his business to help work them out, and he did it with tremendous vigor, even with violence at times.

Great physical endurance. Much has been said of Paul's weakness of body. It is true that he first visited the Galatian church by reason of "an infirmity of the flesh,"¹⁰ which probably means that he was sick. Someone has described him as small in size, bald-headed, bandy-legged, with meeting eyebrows and hooked nose. His

⁵ Acts 22. 3.

⁶ Gal. 4. 21-31.

⁷ 1 Cor. 10. 4.

⁸ Gal. 3. 16.

⁹ Acts 22. 4.

¹⁰ Gal. 4. 13.

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bodily illnesses have been listed as follows: epilepsy, malaria, sore eyes, and a recent suggestion is that he had chronic appendicitis! This is a gruesome list, drawn probably from the imagination of commentators who have believed that a peculiar sanctity inheres in bodily weakness. There are still some few people left in the world who think that a minister or Christian worker of any sort should be lean, pale-faced, sepulchral voiced, timid and almost cringing in his attitude, bearing about a spirit of weakness, lest how, indeed, could the dear fellow be "made strong in weakness"!

A biblical type. Now, the Bible heroes are very different from that. Elijah girded himself and ran sixteen miles alongside Ahab's chariot horses.¹¹ John the Baptist was to remind people of Elijah.¹² There is no record of Jesus ever having had a day of sickness. There is really very little to prove that Paul was a physical weakling. He was probably the kind of a man who, if he had been on a modern college campus, would have been chosen for quarterback on the football squad; small and compact of stature, quick as a cat, keen in intellect, tough and wiry, made to act quickly, to suffer punishment if need be, and to go through with a smile. Granting that he was once sick, why should we load him up with this list of ailments of which there is practically nothing said in the Bible? Here is his own description of his endurance test: "In prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; *in* journeyings often, *in* perils of rivers, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils from my countrymen, *in* perils from the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; *in* labor and travail, *in* watchings often, *in* hunger and thirst, *in* fastings often, *in* cold and nakedness."¹³ This does not sound very much like the record of a physical weakling.

¹¹ 1 Kings 19. 46.

¹² Luke 1. 17.

¹³ 2 Cor. 11. 23-27.

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His "thorn in the flesh." The most helpful suggestion toward the understanding of references to the "thorn in the flesh,"¹⁴ upon which are built the theories of his bodily weakness, is found in his use of the word "flesh" as it appears in Philippians 3. 4, 5: "Though I myself might have confidence even in the flesh: if any other man thinketh to have confidence in the flesh, I yet more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews." The word "flesh" is used to describe Paul's Jewish lineage. Then, if we will remember that Paul's Jewish coreligionists persecuted him, even threatened his very life, at almost every step of his missionary career, we can easily understand how he may have prayed God thrice to be delivered from this thorn in his "flesh," that is, from the constant persecution of his Jewish brethren. In view of the journeys prosecuted and of the sufferings endured, the claim of extreme bodily weakness of any kind seems unreasonable. Absence of adequate evidence forbids any finality on this moot question.

His Pharisaic beliefs. As a Pharisee,¹⁵ Paul would believe with all his heart in the coming Messianic kingdom and perhaps in the personal Messiah. He would believe in the resurrection from the dead.¹⁶ He would believe in righteousness of conduct and life. He could be expected to have a zeal which "would compass sea and land" to accomplish its purpose.

His knowledge of the Christian movement. It is very difficult to tell just how much Paul had learned of the new Christian movement. Possibly he had seen Jesus, but it is doubtful.¹⁷ We know he was present at the death of Stephen¹⁸ and encouraged that murder. He declares that he, as a member of the Sanhedrin, gave his voice against the Christians, and that he sought to compel them to blasphemy, persecuting¹⁹ them even to the death. Doubtless he believed the Christian sect to be built upon spurious claims. He probably thought of Jesus as an impostor and the stories of his resurrection as idle, if not evil tales. As

¹⁴ 2 Cor. 12. 7-9.

¹⁵ Acts 23. 6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ 2 Cor. 5. 16.

¹⁸ Acts 7. 58; 8. 1.

¹⁹ 1 Cor. 15. 9.

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one who loved God and sought to establish the truth, it was his solemn duty to crush out this wicked movement.

On the Damascus road. The story of his conversion is dramatically told in the Acts. It was with the purpose of doing God service that he secured from the Jerusalem authorities permission to arrest such of the Jewish community in Damascus²⁰ as might be found guilty of espousing the new movement, and started thither to carry out his plan. Doubtless the somewhat longer and tiresome journey gave him opportunity for deep thought. He was sorely dissatisfied with his failure to accomplish spiritual righteousness, although he did not violate his own conscience,²¹ and as far as the letter of the law was concerned, was blameless.²² But there was no sense of complete mastery over the evil which attacked men from without, or which pulled backward within. Suddenly he was arrested by a heavenly vision.²³ A voice, speaking the language in which his mother spoke to him when a child, tenderly addressed him, saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the goad."²⁴ At once he cried: "Who art thou, Lord?" And the answer came: "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

When we remember Paul's Pharisaic training, his belief in a resurrection and a personal Messiah, and consider that he was now overwhelmingly convinced of the resurrection of Jesus, he must have been, at once, in the instant, convinced of the truthfulness of the claim that Jesus was still living, that he was the Messiah, and that he was therefore the Master of men. Saul was not slow to act when once convinced, and he cried at once: "What shall I do, Lord?"²⁵ He was told to go to Damascus and wait a directing word from God's servant, Ananias, who should come to him there. So in dimness of sight, yet in gladness of heart, he waited the coming of the good man who was to direct him concerning his work.

The victorious life. Ananias, coming to Saul in Damascus, placed his hand upon his head and prayed that there

²⁰ Acts 9. 15.

²¹ Acts 23. 1.

²² Phil. 3. 6.

²³ Acts 9. 3.

²⁴ Acts 26. 14-15.

²⁵ Acts 22. 10.

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might be given him the gift of the Holy Spirit and that his sight, which had been dimmed by the brightness of the experience on the Damascus road, might be restored to him.²⁶ His prayer was answered. We cannot pass this stage of Paul's life without stopping to notice the change which came to him. On his way from Jerusalem his zeal was at the highest pitch. He seems to have had no sense of outward wrongdoing, he was hastening to do God's will as he understood it, and yet in his own inner life he found himself failing to measure up to the ethical standards set by his own conscience. Romans 7. 15-20 describes his sense of defeat, even in the midst of high endeavor. "For that which I do I know not: for not what I would, that do I practise; but what I hate, that I do. . . . So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me. . . . For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise." But now, since his conversion to the attitude of supreme loyalty to Jesus as Christ, he discovers a new law working in his life, and this is described in Romans 8. 1, 2, 38, 39: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death. . . . For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

It was a decided *change of mind*, because he had come to believe in Him as the Messiah whom he had formerly considered to be an impostor. It was also a *new loyalty*, even the kind of loyalty which only one of Paul's intense nature could give, and that to Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. But it was more. It was a *new life* ministered to him by the Divine Spirit and giving him a sense of peace and triumph hitherto unknown, and given always to those who put their trust in Christ. This new life is the secret of the Pauline ministry. It made Paul a leader in a series

²⁶ Acts 22. 12.

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of events more important in world-history than any single event excepting that of the work of Jesus himself.

Sent to the Gentiles. To his surprise he found himself drawn into preaching to the Gentile world. It seems that he was just a little eager to undertake on the behalf of his Jewish brethren. According to the Acts, he himself tells²⁷ of having prayed about the matter and having offered as argument in his prayer that they knew of the zeal with which he had persecuted the Christians, and that, knowing this and now seeing his own conviction, they would believe him. They would probably have killed him, as they sought to do later. At any rate, the Divine Voice and unmistakably favorable opportunities sent him to the Gentile mission. So he went first into the wilderness of Arabia and afterward was preaching in Syria and Cilicia, making his headquarters at Damascus.²⁸

Paul at Antioch. In the meantime, the Christian movement had run as far as Antioch. Here, as noted in a previous chapter, not only Jews were converted, but also quite a number of Greeks, and they were together in one worshiping group. Barnabas had been sent from Jerusalem to minister to them, and as his work grew, and having previously known Saul and his work, he called upon him to help.²⁹ Thus there was set up at Antioch a new Christian center of operations. Hitherto Jerusalem had been headquarters for Christianity, but everything which went out from Jerusalem had a Hebraic color. The gospel was soon to be preached to the Gentiles and from this new starting-place of broader fellowship and of wider vision the missionaries were to go out who should evangelize not only the Jews, but the Gentiles as well.

His first missionary tour. This church sent out from its leaders no less persons than Barnabas and Paul³⁰ to represent them in preaching the gospel to others. Few churches of the present day have measured up to the self-denial of the church at Antioch in sending its recognized men of prominence to the mission field. Barnabas and Paul, going down to Seleucia, crossed to Cyprus. With

²⁷ Acts 22. 19-21.

²⁸ Gal. 1. 17, 21.

²⁹ Acts 11. 25-26.

³⁰ Acts 13. 2-3.

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them, as a servant, they had John Mark.³¹ They first went to the synagogues in each case,³² but after having passed through Cyprus they were summoned by the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus,³³ who wished to know concerning their teaching. As a result of their words and of a miracle wrought upon an opposing sorcerer, the Roman ruler was converted. Paul and Barnabas, turning back through Cyprus, came again to the mainland of Asia and seemed to have pursued from here almost a purely Gentile mission. John Mark left them.³⁴ Possibly, being a Jerusalemite, he was hardly ready for so radical a step as preaching the gospel to the Gentiles and freely admitting them to the Christian Church without the intermediary Jewish steps which had been taken by nearly all the Christians up to that time.

Barnabas and Paul continued their way from the sea to Pisidian Antioch, Derbe, and Lystra; retracing their steps, they strengthened the communities which they had established, and then returned to the new center of their work, Antioch. Here they made their report, which was, of course, received with great joy by the church. They then continued for some time, preaching and evangelizing as before, in this great city. Thus we find the new leader, Paul, fully engaged in his important task of preaching to the Gentiles.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. For whom was Saul of Tarsus probably named?
2. What was the city of his boyhood?
3. Where did he complete his schooling?
4. What was the condition of the Jews of the Dispersion?
5. What were the privileges of Roman citizenship?
6. What may be said of Paul's character and of his physical appearance?
7. What may have been his "thorn in the flesh"?
8. What changes in thought, attitude, and character came to Paul on the Damascus road?

³¹ Acts 13. 5

³³ *Ibid.*

³² Acts 13. 7.

³⁴ Acts 13. 13.

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9. In what respects was Paul specially qualified to become a Christian missionary to the Gentiles?

10. Tell of the beginning of this mission.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What, if any, is the truth in the expression, "Blood will tell"?

2. What is it to become a Christian? What do you think it meant to Paul?

3. What were the essential features of Paul's conversion? (By "essential" is meant that without which there would have been no conversion.)

4. Granting that we have come upon less instantaneous ideals of beginning the Christian life, have we made a gain or a loss? Why?

5. How did the difficulties faced by Paul compare with those encountered by a present-day foreign missionary?

6. What influences did Paul's education have upon his life? How is our Christianity affected by our education?

7. If we love Jesus, are we to show it by strain of spirit and suffering of body, as Paul did?

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CHAPTER VI

THE CONFLICTS OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

EARLY Christianity did not have an open field for its race. Nor did the religions which had held the attention of the Græco-Roman world yield without a struggle. Moreover, the growing movement naturally attached to itself some spirits who were daring and progressive; others who were naturally timid and conservative. This varied situation gave rise to the conflicts of early Christianity. We shall consider here three groups: with the Jews, with the Romans, and with the Judaizing Christians. The struggle with rival cults will be considered in Chapter VIII.

I. WITH THE JEWS

Jesus and the Jewish Authorities. Jesus was in the best sense of the word a Jew. He was born of a Jewish mother, reared in a Jewish town in Palestine, accredited as a Jewish man at the time of his visit to the Temple at the age of twelve. He spent practically his whole ministry within the boundaries of Palestine. On many occasions he gave evidence of his love for the institutions, the literature, and the traditions of the race from which he sprang.

Nevertheless, his subordination of Jewish institutions, rites, ceremonies, and traditions to the welfare of those for whom and with whom he worked soon put him at enmity with the more scrupulous observers of the letter of the Jewish law. Perhaps there was jealousy also regarding the tremendous following which Jesus enlisted. The outcome was that they succeeded in catching him in words which by them were called blasphemy, and by the help of the Roman authorities they put him to death.

The Jerusalem rulers and the early Christians. The early

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Christians being all of the Jewish religion continued steadfast in the observances of that faith. They went regularly to the Temple at the stated times of prayer,¹ they doubtless observed the great religious festivals, and although they were probably considered a bit "off shade" by the more strict Jews, yet continued to be received as brethren. But in a short while the freedom of the new faith found various points of tension with the old habit of religion. There was less of attention to the letter, more of liberty in spirit. There were the casting out of demons and the healing of the sick in the name of Jesus.² There was the proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah.³ There was the grouping together of this new constituency who were called "Nazarenes" or "People of the Way."⁴

Conflict with the Sadducees. The first real conflict came at the time of the healing of the lame man at the Gate Beautiful.⁵ There was a great rushing together of the people and a new wave of enthusiasm for the Christian movement. The Temple authorities, who were chiefly Sadducees, had the apostles arrested. The charge probably was that of casting out demons in some other name than that of Jehovah himself, which put it on the level with the exorcism of the Gentiles. While they did not formally convict them of this charge, they adjured them not to speak or preach any more *in the name of Jesus*.⁶ This, however, they did not promise to do, and although they were threatened by these authorities, they did not cease to speak and preach. In all probability the real fear was political and economic—political, for fear that rioting might lead to trouble with their Roman patrons, and economic, in that too great enthusiasm for the new movement might lead to a shrinkage in the funds spent in ritual and sacrifice.

Conflict with the Pharisees. The trouble which arose about the teaching of Stephen seems to have been with those more religious spirits who valued both the Law and the Temple more highly than the Sadducees were wont

¹ Acts 2. 42; 3. 1.

² Acts 4. 9-10.

³ Acts 2. 36.

⁴ Acts 9. 2.

⁵ Acts 3. 2ff.

⁶ Acts 4. 18.

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to do. It is difficult to know just what Stephen taught,⁷ but it is evident that, among other things, his high concept of the spirituality of Christianity gave a lower value to the Temple as an exclusive place of worship and also a comparatively lower appreciation of the Law with the voluminous interpretation which had come to be built around it. Here, of course, the feeling was more intense, and Stephen's life was taken. Persecution arose and the extra-Palestinian group of believers seem to have been wholly driven from Jerusalem. The apostles, who were themselves all of Palestinian origin, were allowed to remain.⁸

Jewish conflicts with Paul and his fellow workers. Perhaps no one thing could have so thoroughly aroused the hostility of the Jewish community as the conversion of Saul⁹ of Tarsus to the sect of the "Nazarenes." They set out with redoubled energy to persecute his work, and, if possible, to put him and his fellow workers out of the way. They first drove him from Damascus, whence he was compelled to escape by being let down over the wall in a basket.¹⁰ They followed him from place to place on his missionary journeys, either themselves persecuting him, or else stirring up the proselytes or even the rabble to offer injury to Paul and those with him. To Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Derbe, Lystra, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Jerusalem, they followed him. When they finally succeeded in having him arrested, they employed a lawyer to plead before Felix,¹¹ and they again appeared in his trial before Festus.¹² In every place where opportunity was given, his Jewish brethren persecuted him to the limit. He tells that they succeeded in flogging him. "Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one."¹³ At the time he was attacked in Jerusalem, had it not been for the timely interference of the centurion¹⁴ and his soldiers, Paul would have followed Stephen in martyrdom. Paul loved his own nation more than life. In Romans 9. 1-3 he says: "I say

⁷ Acts 7.

⁸ Acts 8. 1.

⁹ Acts 9. 1-18.

¹⁰ Acts 9. 23-25.

¹¹ Acts 24. 1.

¹² Acts 25. 1, 7.

¹³ 2 Cor. 11. 24.

¹⁴ Acts 21. 32.

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the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh." No wonder that their constant persecution was to him a "thorn in the flesh," and that he prayed earnestly to be delivered from it. Failing to obtain deliverance, he found the grace of God sufficient to help him endure this cross.

II. FROM ROMAN AND PAGAN PERSECUTORS

The Romans and Jesus. Josephus says that Herod feared the political power of John the Baptist, as he was followed by such great multitudes, and it was doubtless for this reason as well as the one given in the Scripture, the jealousy of Herodias, that he was willing to put John the Baptist to death. One of the charges which the mob shouted against Jesus was, "He stirreth up the people."¹⁵ And another declared that he made himself to be another king: "We have no king but Cæsar."¹⁶ Had the Roman authority in Palestine not lived in such constant danger of rioting mobs, they might not have been persuaded to crucify Jesus. But the Jews of Palestine were a turbulent lot, and Roman governors were often hard pressed to maintain quiet. So Jesus was put to death. A very interesting tradition, although apocryphal, has come down through the early Christian Church, namely, that the court record of the trial and sentence of Jesus afterward became public property, and was used as an apologetic by the early Christians. Eusebius, the church historian of the fourth century, states that a false record of this trial and sentence was, by imperial edict, required to be taught by the Roman schoolmasters throughout the empire. This, of course, was after Christianity had made some headway and the Roman government was officially opposing it.

Paul and the government officials. Several times, by reason of being in the mob, Paul fell into the hands of

¹⁵ Luke 23. 5.

¹⁶ John 19. 15.

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Roman officers. At Philippi he was arrested, convicted, put into the government prison, and later, when it was discovered that he was a Roman citizen, quickly released with apologies.¹⁷ At Thessalonica Jason, his host, was required to give bond¹⁸ to the Roman government. At Athens he was required to come before the Areopagite Council, that they might pass upon his teaching.¹⁹ At Corinth he was brought before Gallio, who in disgust dismissed him when he learned that the charge was simply a matter concerning the Jewish religion.²⁰ At Ephesus Paul was in danger of arrest, but the town clerk dismissed the mob and Paul escaped.²¹ At Jerusalem he was saved from the Jewish mob by the intervention of Claudius Lysias, the centurion.²² This officer ordered him to be scourged in order that they might compel him to confess, but later changed the order upon learning that Paul was a Roman.²³ He was treated with respect, yet held in prison for two years by Felix. He was brought before Festus and had a hearing before Agrippa. He finally was granted the highest privilege which could be accorded to a Roman prisoner—that of appealing to the Cæsar himself.²⁴ In every account of Paul's appearance before the Roman officials he is very respectful toward them, and there is uniform fairness on the part of Roman officials toward him, with the single exception of Felix, who detained him in the hope of securing a bribe.²⁵

The Roman government and the persecution of Christians after Paul. The Roman authorities by law were required to respect all the religions which were known to be established in the empire. Beginning with Augustus, the emperors were deified, and business transactions, whether solemnized by oath to the local deities or not, were solemnized by an oath taken "by the fortune of the emperor." The Christians were at first regarded as a sect of the Jews and so had no difficulty with

¹⁷ Acts 16. 38-39.

¹⁸ Acts 17. 9.

¹⁹ Acts 17. 19.

²⁰ Acts 18. 14-16.

²¹ Acts 19. 35ff.

²² Acts 21. 31.

²³ Acts 22. 27.

²⁴ Acts 25. 11-12.

²⁵ Acts 24. 26.

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the Roman officials, but when they came to be a distinct group they came into conflict with the authorities in many places. Several things conspired to cause the Roman officials to be suspicious of them. They were, until the time of Constantine (313 A. D., to be exact), an unauthorized sect. They called Jesus "Lord," which was the name by which the emperor was called, which seemed to place him in rivalry with the emperor. As long as it was simply "Jesus the Christ" there was no trouble, but when it came to be "the Lord Jesus Christ" there was suspicion on the part of the Romans. The Christians refused to do obeisance to any of the recognized Roman deities. They acknowledged no God other than Jehovah and Jesus, whom he had sent. They refused to burn the incense to the image, or to swear by the fate of the emperor. In places where Christianity was especially successful the sale of cattle and other sacrificial beasts used in the pagan religious exercises so fell away that the growth of Christianity meant the ruin of the market in live stock. At Ephesus we know that the progress of Christianity cut down the sale of certain small images of Diana and thus damaged the business of the jewelers. So after a time there was issued an imperial edict ordering that persons who confessed themselves to be Christian should, on that confession alone, be punished. As an illustration, we shall notice some correspondence coming from a period shortly after the time of Paul.

Pliny to Trajan. Pliny the Younger (born about 61-62 A. D.) of Bithynia and Pontus, finding such laws on the statute books, was perplexed as to their enforcement. An authentic copy of a letter from him to the emperor has come down to us and reads as follows:

It is customary for me, O Master, to refer all things concerning which I hesitate to you, for who is better able to dispel my hesitation or instruct my ignorance? I have never been present at any trials of the Christians, and for that reason I do not know how it is customary to punish or to what extent it is customary to interrogate. I have hesitated considerably whether or not there should be some discrimination as to age; whether the weak should be treated differently than the strong; whether clemency should be shown for penitence; or

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whether to have ceased to be a Christian is of profit to one who has once been a Christian; whether the mere profession, if it is free from crime, should be punished or whether crime adhering to the name should be punished.

Meanwhile, toward those Christians who were reported to me I have followed this course: I have questioned them whether they were Christians. I have questioned those admitting it a second and a third time, threatening punishment. I have ordered those persevering to be led to execution. Nor do I doubt that whoever they were that confessed it, certainly such pertinacity and inflexible obstinacy ought to be punished. Some who were of like madness, because they were Roman citizens, I allowed to return into the (Roman) city. Soon, by the very fact of a judicial procedure, as is usually the case, the offense extending, many more cases have been reported. Information containing many names was lodged anonymously. Those who denied that they were Christians, when, repeating the words after me, they called upon the gods and your image, which for this purpose I ordered to be borne in with the images of the gods, when they supplicated with incense and wine, and in addition when they renounced Christ, of which things they say that those who are true Christians can be forced to do nothing, I thought that they ought to be released. Some, being accused by the judge, said they were Christians and soon denied it. They, indeed, said that they were, but that they had ceased to be; some, many years before; one, only twenty days. All of these also venerated your image and the images of the gods and reviled Christ. They affirmed, moreover, that this was the height of their folly and error, that they were accustomed to meet at stated intervals before dawn and say a form of prayer to Christ as though to a god. To each other in turn they bound themselves together by an oath, not in any crime, but in order that they should not commit thefts nor outrages nor adultery, in order that they should not disappoint the faith; and in order that when called upon to restore it they should not deny the deposit. Having done these things, it had been their custom to disperse. Again they gathered for the taking of ordinary and harmless food. They said they had ceased to do these things after my edict in which, following your commands, I prohibited associations. For which reason I believed it the more necessary to seek what there was of truth, even through tortments, from two servant women who were called deaconesses. I came upon nothing more than the depraved and immodest superstition, and so, having extended my knowledge, I have hastened to you for advice; for the thing has seemed to me fitting for consultation, especially on account of the number of those imperiled. For many of all ages, of all ranks, and even of both sexes, have been and will be called into danger. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only in

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the cities, but also in the villages and in the country. Certainly, it is fitting now for the desolated temples to be rebuilt and solemn sacrifice for so long given up to be repeated and food to be bought for victims of which hitherto the most rare purchasers have been found. For which reason it is easy to see that the majority of men can be corrected if place is given for repentance.

Trajan's answer. "You have followed the course that you ought, my Secundus, in investigating the cases of those Christians brought before you, for anything in general cannot be decided as if it had a certain form. They are not to be sought out. If they are brought before you and accused, they must be punished. Just so, nevertheless, that anyone who denies that he is a Christian and should make it manifest by that particular thing, that is, supplication to our gods, although suspected in the past, shall receive clemency because of his penitence. Accusation given anonymously should have no weight in any court. For it is very bad as a precedent and not in accord with the spirit of our age."²³

In the light of this correspondence the words of First Peter are clearly understood: "If ye are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are ye*; because the *Spirit* of glory and the Spirit of God resteth upon you. For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil-doer, or as a meddler in other men's matters: but if *a man* suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name" (1 Peter 4. 14-16).

Persecution under Nero. Here also should be studied the account of the persecution under Nero as recorded in Tacitus' "Amals" xv: 44. It has to do with Nero trying to free himself from the charge of setting fire to Rome, 64 A. D.

Neither by works of benevolence nor the gifts of the prince nor by means of appeasing the gods did the shameful suspicion cease, so that it was not believed that the fire had been caused by his command. Therefore, to overcome this rumor,

²³ Plinus Junior, *Epistulae* x, 96, 97. Translation quoted from Ayer, *Source Book for Ancient Church History*. Published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1913.

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Nero put in his own place as culprits, and punished with most ingenious cruelty, men whom the common people hated for their shameful crimes and called Christians. Christ, from whom the name was derived, had been put to death in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate. The deadly superstition having been checked for awhile began to break out again, not only throughout Judæa, where this mischief first arose, but also at Rome, where from all sides all things scandalous and shameful meet and become fashionable. Therefore, at the beginning, some were seized who made confessions; then, on their information, a vast multitude was convicted, not so much of arson as of hatred of the human race. And they were not only put to death, but subjected to insults, in that they were either dressed up in the skins of wild beasts and perished by the cruel mangling of dogs, or else put on crosses to be set on fire, and, as the day declined, to be burned, being used as lights by night. Nero had thrown open his gardens for that spectacle, and gave a circus play, mingling with the people dressed in a charioteer's costume and driving a chariot. From this arose, however, toward men who were, indeed, criminals and deserving extreme penalties, sympathy, on the ground that they were destroyed, not for the public good, but to satisfy the cruelty of an individual.²⁷

Here we have the popular idea of Christianity, but proof of its strength, of its ability to suffer, and of at least some little sympathy on the part of noble-minded pagans.

III. WITH JUDAIZING CHRISTIANS

1. The Jewish roots of Christianity. It is difficult for us who are Gentile Christians to feel how fully the beginnings of the Christian movement were in the Jewish church. Jesus and the twelve apostles, all the early evangelists and deacons, the authors of all the books of the New Testament, with the possible exception of two, all were Jews. The Old Testament Scripture was taken over almost wholly in the new church; more fully, indeed, by the later church than Jesus himself or Paul took it over. Early Christianity was the crown of Judaism. Jesus was and is the most distinguished member of the Jewish race. Much of the church government was patterned after the synagogue worship, and the sacraments were outgrowths

²⁷ Translation quoted from Ayer, *Source Book of Ancient Church History*. Published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1914.

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or modifications of existing Jewish practices. At first the Christians continued their worship in the Temple and in the synagogues along with their Jewish brethren, and for a long while the Christian appeal was directed almost wholly either to the Jews or to those who were in some way attached to the synagogue worship, so that all these early Christians came to believe in Jesus as Messiah, and to have the spirit of loyalty to him and to his cause, through the open door of Judaism. Certain common ritual practices made it convenient for them to eat together and to have social fellowship.

2. The Appearance of the Gentile in the church. But Christianity came to offer salvation on terms of faith only, and when, under the preaching of the missionaries who went out from the new center at Antioch, the Gentiles were received into the Christian Church without being required to be circumcised or to abandon the eating of pork or to discontinue the serving of meats which were bloody—in short, to neglect the laws regarding “clean and unclean”—the Christians of Jewish origin naturally were ill at ease, and some of them positively rebellious, at the innovation. So there grew up, especially in the Jerusalem church, a feeling that these Gentiles who came into the Christian community should be required to take over at least the more important of the Jewish ceremonies. Some thought they should be circumcised. Some thought they should be more scrupulous in eating and drinking. There was very sharp contention on this matter at the time when certain visitors came to Antioch from Jerusalem.²⁸ So sharp was it that the Christians at Antioch decided to have a conference with the church at Jerusalem, and they sent a delegation, of whom Paul and Barnabas were two, to thoroughly discuss the matter. According to the account in Acts a compromise was reached: word was sent back to the church at Antioch that the new Gentile Christians should abstain from idols, from fornication, which probably means intermarriage of those near of kin, from things strangled, and from blood. If they

²⁸ Gal. 2. 11.

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would do this, then there could be intermingling with the Jewish Christians.²⁹ It is noticeable that the chief item of conflict, namely, that of circumcision, was not mentioned. As the Gentile group became larger these restrictions fell into disuse. In fact, they seem never to have been enforced.

The Jerusalem church seems to have become more and more reactionary against the teaching of the Pauline gospel of freedom, and when Paul came to Jerusalem bearing the gifts of all the Gentile churches, they seemed to give almost no attention to his offering, but insisted that he should at once set himself at rights with those "myriads" who had believed,³⁰ all of whom were "zealous for the law." So Paul was drawn into an exercise³¹ in which he tried to keep his freedom of spirit and at the same time to satisfy the demands of these compromising brethren, with the result that he was misunderstood and mobbed, nearly losing his life at the hands of the Jews. He was kept in prison at Jerusalem and at Cæsarea for about two years. During all this time there is no record of the Jerusalem Christians making the slightest attempt to secure the release of this outstanding missionary of their own faith. In fact, it is doubtful if these Judaizing Christians considered Paul's Christianity to be genuine. They seemed to have systematically opposed him from place to place. In the Epistle to the Philippians, written probably from Rome, Paul speaks of some who "preach Christ even of envy and strife; . . . thinking to raise up affliction for me in my bonds."³² In Second Corinthians he speaks of the perils in which he was from "false brethren."³³ It is evident that the Judaizing party in early Christianity was not small. It was ultimately eclipsed by the Gentile mission, and, becoming more and more reactionary, finally received its death blow in the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A. D., although it struggled on for a few decades after that time. Had Paul and those who followed him not been courageous enough to

²⁹ Acts 15. 20-21.

³⁰ Acts 21. 20.

³¹ Acts 21. 23ff.

³² Phil. 1. 15, 17.

³³ 2 Cor. 11. 26.

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fight this battle through, Christianity might have become established as a Jewish sect, and as such could never have had the universal mission which was given it in the greater freedom of the new gospel.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. With what three groups did early Christianity chiefly come into contact?
2. In what ways would you show Jesus to be a Jew?
3. In what ways did he get the enmity of the Jewish leaders?
4. What were the points of tension between the early Christians and the Jerusalem leaders?
5. Why did the Sadducees oppose the Christians?
6. What objections would be raised by Pharisees?
7. Why did the Jews so sorely persecute Paul?
8. On what charge was Jesus put to death?
9. What can be said regarding Paul and the Roman officials?
10. Why did Nero put the Christians to death?
11. Tell of the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan.
12. Why did the Judaizing Christians dislike Paul?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is religious controversy usually so bitter?
2. Is it true that controversy is more likely to arise and to be more bitter between those whose differences are only slight than between those who are at wide variance? Why?
3. It has been said, "There is an economic root for every kind of trouble." In what measure is this true?
4. What would be the arguments by which a Judaizer would justify oppression of Paul?
5. Is persecution the worst evil which can befall a good movement? What would be worse?
6. Would modern Christians be more faithful and devoted if the "going" were not so easy?
7. Would a more Christlike life and attitude probably invite persecution in our own day?

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8. Could a person live the "Jesus kind of a life" in our community? If so, what would happen to him? to others?

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CHAPTER VII

EXPANSION UNDER PAUL AND HIS FOLLOWERS

A STUDY of the growth of early Christianity under Paul and those who came after him involves first of all a study of their missionary methods. They took the materials which were already at hand and made a bridge across to the Gentile world. They began with the synagogues.

Beginning with the synagogue. Doubtless the early Christian movement was most fortunate in that many who had been trained in the synagogues and in Jewish homes, believing that Jesus was the expected Messiah, came enthusiastically into the church. Then there were the God-fearers (see chapter IV), who found in the freedom of Christian teaching and life just the righteousness they sought. They seem to have come to Christianity almost *en masse* in some cities. Moreover, the synagogues were in every town and city, and they offered an opening door to the Christian preachers throughout the empire. Thus the Christian church acquired entrance, and secured charter members of character and training.

Yet the Pauline missionaries did not stop with the synagogues, although they seem to have hesitated at first. For two very evident reasons they extended their preaching to the Gentiles: First, the Jews who were unconvinced of Jesus' Messiahship were incensed at seeing not only many of their most devoted friends led off into this, which they regarded as a dangerous heresy, but also seeing those who by faithful teaching they had hoped to proselytize slip fully from their grasp. The missionaries and their converts were often driven from the synagogues and forced to find friends elsewhere. Second, the Gentiles, when given the Good News, seem to have been already religiously awakened by their own cults and were in many cases sin-

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gularly ready to accept; and while they needed more careful training than those who had come from the synagogues, they brought into the church an enthusiasm and independence of tradition which were exceedingly valuable. Then, of course, Paul was a Tarsian Jew and Barnabas a Cypriote. They must have had many friends among the Gentiles, and a love for them unknown to the average Palestinian Jew. So it was no hardship to go to the Gentiles.

The adaptation of the message. Judging by the sermons as reported in the Acts and the Pauline letters the early missionaries found ways of presenting their central message in terms which were significant to the people who heard. In the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia¹ Paul had a Jewish audience and began his sermon from the story of the Exodus. He found Jesus to be the outcome of that historical process and proved it by citations from their prophets; at Lystra² among the simple-minded pagans he preached of a "living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea" and who "gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness." There was no use in quoting Scripture to that crowd, for they did not know it. To the listeners at Athens³ Paul took his text from the altar to "*An Unknown God*," complimented them on being so religious as to fill their streets with the statues of their divinities, and then quoted from their own poet to show the greatness of God and the need of a revelation. At Corinth Paul seemed at a loss for a text, but finally determined that in a city so profligate he could do no better than to know only "Jesus Christ, and him crucified."⁴

A study of the adaptation of the message to the group will convince us that it was successful, and may well raise a question as to our present-day efficiency in this regard.

The presence of God assumed. No pity need be wasted on those adventurous preachers. They were certain of two things: that God lived by his Spirit in them, and that the same Spirit would make even the "preaching of foolishness" effective. There can be no other reason given

¹ Acts 13. 16ff.

² Acts 14. 15ff.

³ Acts 17. 22ff.

⁴ 1 Cor. 2. 2.

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both for their devotion and courage and the confidence with which they "got results."

Ethics uppermost. Again, the early church was a contender against every form of evil and a strong partisan for every kind of good. Most specially were the evils present in their society attacked: drunkenness, cruelty, thieving, sins of greed and of sex, pride, murder, strife, deceit, malignity. A study of the catalogues given in Romans 1. 26-32, Galatians 5. 19-21, and Colossians 3. 5-9 will help to understand how definite and searching the preaching was. On the other hand, every Pauline Epistle has its exhortations to righteous living. A reading of Romans 12, Galatians 5. 22ff, Ephesians, Chapters 4, 5, 6, will make it plain that one very important reason for the success of Christianity was that *it made bad people good*, and expected good people to become better.

Primarily a "movement." It is doubtful if the earliest Christians were "church-conscious." The believers met from house to house.⁵ No church buildings of any importance appeared until the second century. They simply had Good News—the best news in the world. They had a fellowship with God through Christ—and a fellowship one with another. They achieved a moral superiority, a peace, a social sympathy, a hope of heaven and a love not known elsewhere. What more did they need?

Minimum of organization and creed. The above paragraph points to the fact that there was no organized hierarchy nor any lengthy or formal creed. Paul appointed "elders" in every church.⁶ In 1 Corinthians 12. 28, he names the types of ministry which up to that time were rather charismatic than official. For creed they seemed to cling pretty closely to Jesus—that he was Messiah and Lord and Redeemer; other matters of belief were marginal. One wonders just what the Pauline reaction would have been to such formulæ as our modern creeds and confessions.

Following up. After local leadership was established, the Christian group was given opportunity to develop its

⁵ Acts 2. 46.

⁶ Acts 14. 23.

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own life under the Spirit's guidance, which was always presupposed; yet it is evident that by further visits and by pastoral letters there was a faithful continuance of care and the exercise of a spiritual authority which amounted to a pretty well-organized supervisory scheme.

The important centers. With such methods the leaders made it a point to attack the places of greatest difficulty and importance. A study of the roads and travel of the first century will show that the Christian movement took fast hold on the great centers of trade and travel and worked out from them. Doubtless it would have been easier to settle in some quiet eddy of the empire, and very probably the number of converts at first might have been greater, but they were thinking in imperial terms. May not Paul's Roman citizenship have helped to give him his world-plans?

Jerusalem. Here for a few brief years were Christian headquarters. It was the center of the Jewish world, its population increasing by possibly a million at the great festivals. Thus anything present in Jerusalem would be exposed to the Jews everywhere.⁷ In the beginning Christianity made great strides here. But the unwillingness of the Jerusalem Christians to accept the logic of the Gentile movement produced a reactionary tendency which became more and more pronounced until decay set in and it really did not need the Jewish Wars of 66-70 A. D. or the final destruction of 132 A. D. to make an end to its importance as a center of Christianity.

Antioch in Syria. This city was founded as the capital of Syria by Seleucus Nikator, successor of Alexander the Great. It was on an important river, the Orontes. It was the capital of the Roman Province of Syria. It stood, in importance in the empire, next only to Rome and Alexandria. A city of beauty, with its colonnaded central street, its theaters, baths, temples, and public buildings. Its population was noted for independence and vigor. Here were both a challenge and an opportunity. The church entered at once.

⁷ Acts 2. 5ff.

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Ephesus. This city was the metropolis of the Roman province of Asia, the commercial center of great roads by land and travel by sea. The life-blood of the empire going to the East flowed through here, as through an artery. Its trade, its thought, its rule found a point of entrance and of influence. Here Paul spent three years, and made recurring visits.

Philippi. A city historically prominent. Founded by Philip of Macedon. Near the great Egnatian Road. It was famous as the place of defeat of Brutus and Cassius by Antony and Octavian, 42 B. C., and also for the battle of Actium in 31 B. C. It was a Roman "colony"—settled by soldiers whose term of service was ended. It was organized on the plan of the capital itself and was a city of wide influence in Macedonia.

Thessalonica. This city (now known as Saloniki) was one of the most important in the near East. It had a great bay or harbor. It received the waters of three important rivers, and commanded the trade of their fertile valleys. It was on the Egnatian Way and was considered the head of the province of Macedonia. Here lived the Roman governor of that province. The story in Acts and the two Epistles show the eagerness with which Paul set up his gospel there.

Corinth. This was the most important city of Greece. It was the capital of the province of Achaia. A number of important roads converged here. It commanded all land connections between central Greece and the Peloponnesus. Much of the sea trade was transshipped here. It was a city of great commerce, the seat of the celebrated Isthmian Games, the site of the great temple of Aphrodite. It was rich, proud, profligate. An officer of no less importance than Gallio, brother of Seneca, was the proconsul before whom the Jews brought Paul in this city. Christianity came to grips with its most trying task. We know that Paul worked here at least twice, spending many months,⁸ and have knowledge of probably four letters written by him to them.

⁸ Acts 18. 11.

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Rome. Literally, "All roads led to Rome." It was equally true that all roads led *from* Rome. The eye of the great apostle was on this city. Already Christians coming in from various regions had made a beginning. Here were, in the city and its environs, probably a million and a half of people. Here was the seat of empire with its treasure houses and valuables, its political and social life, its millionaires and beggars, its luxury, its virtues and its vices. Rome was the heart of the world, and Paul spent two years there preaching in his own house.⁹ He wrote one great Epistle to the church there, and not fewer than four letters from Rome. "I must see Rome!" was a slogan of Paul's ministry, and with good reason.

The centrifugal tendency. While great centers were eagerly entered and much labor used to establish churches there, the set policy was always to extend the church from these centers. Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul assures them that he has no need to speak anything, for they have become examples to all Achaia and Macedonia, and that from them the word of the Lord had gone forth everywhere.¹⁰ Writing to the Roman Church he assures them that "your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world."¹¹ In the Revelation¹² we have the well-known "messages to the seven churches of Asia," all of which were very probably offshoots from the mother church in Ephesus. These churches by thus extending the scope of the gospel were only following the spirit of Paul, whose eye was ever on the horizon. Did he get to Spain? We know that he planned to go, and if there was release from his first long imprisonment, he probably went. That is the tradition of the church of the second and succeeding centuries. We are at least certain that he planned to go.

Early Christian geography. Jesus died about 30 A. D. At the end of the century the message of Christianity had been published and had established itself pretty fully from Rome throughout the East. A great historian of the church, working from unquestioned sources, finds evi-

⁹ Acts 28. 30-31.

¹⁰ 1 Thess. 1. 8.

¹¹ Rom. 1. 8.

¹² Rev., chapters 2 and 3.

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dence to show churches in the following towns, cities, and regions by 100 A. D.:¹³

Jerusalem	Tyre	Cilicia
Damascus	Sidon	Salamis (Cyprus)
Samaria	Ptolemais	Paphos
Lydda	Pella	Perga
Joppa	Arabia	Antioch (Pisidian)
Cæsarea (Palestine)	Tarsus	Iconium
Antioch (Syrian)	Syria	Derbe
Galatia	Pergamum	Lystra
Cappodocia	Sardis	Nicopolis
Bithynia and Pontus	Philadelphia (Lydia)	Athens
Ephesus	Magnesia	Corinth
Colossae	Tralles	Cenchreae
Laodicea	Thyatira	Crete
Hierapolis	Troas	Dalmatia
Smyrna	Philippi	Rome
	Thessalonica	Puteoli
	Berea	Spain

If one cared to locate these places on the map, it would help to understand the rapid and very wide spread of this new faith in the empire.

The cultural spread. Geographical extension is not the only measure of expansion. The various classes penetrated by Christianity should be marked.

The slave constituency. Paul reminds certain "high-minded" individuals in Corinth that "not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called,"¹⁴ but, rather, those who were weak and despised. The early church seems to have had a preponderance of slaves, freedmen, and laborers. Before passing from this fact it should be observed what the gospel meant to the slave. Under the law a slave was considered a *res* and not a *persona*. In Christian groups they not only became persons but brethren and sisters. They had every right in the church any other might claim; indeed, as the church grew strong not less than two of its bishops were from the slave class. They were to be treated as brethren beloved¹⁵—by masters

¹³ Harnack, *Expansion of Christianity*. Eng. translation, Vol. II. Published by G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York.

¹⁴ 1 Cor. 1. 26.

¹⁵ Philem. 16.

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and mistresses; they were to do their work not as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ.¹⁶ Instead of having no rights and no moral responsibility, they were expected to exhibit the same virtuous character as any other. The time was not yet ripe for anti-slavery agitation, but it is a mistaken notion to suppose that Christianity "had nothing to do with slavery."

Not all slaves. The Christian group soon came to include others than the lower classes: Sergius Paulus¹⁷ was proconsul of Cyprus; Manæan¹⁸ was the foster brother of Herod. Many "noble women" were influential in Beroea and Thessalonica.¹⁹ Lydia of Philippi was a business woman;²⁰ Dionysius, the Areopagite, was prominent in Athens;²¹ Erastus was treasurer in Corinth;²² Paul speaks of Christian brethren among them "that are of Cæsar's household,"²³ and Pliny tells toward the end of the century that this contagion has seized "many of all ranks."²⁴

Thus we find first-century Christianity wide-spreading geographically, culturally penetrating all strata of society, and with a spirit and technique which promised to send it even wider in the years to follow.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Why were the synagogues a good place to begin Christian preaching?
2. In what ways was the Christian message adapted to conditions?
3. What place had ethics in early Christian teaching?
4. Discriminate between a "movement" and an "organization."
5. What was the chief "fundamental" in the belief of the early church?
6. Tell of the importance of Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephe-

¹⁶ Col. 3. 22.

¹⁷ Acts 13. 12.}

¹⁸ Acts 13. 2.

¹⁹ Acts 17. 4, 12.

²⁰ Acts 16. 14.

²¹ Acts 17. 34.

²² Rom. 16. 23.

²³ Phil. 4. 22.

²⁴ See Chapter VI.

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sus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth and Rome as Christian centers.

7. Point out on the map the location of those towns, cities, and countries in which Christian beginnings were made during the first century.

8. In what groups was Christianity first powerful and to what other classes did it spread?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what way do you think Paul justified his preaching in the synagogues?

2. Does adaptation to conditions ever involve surrender of principle? Is it always so?

3. Do you think a short creed better than a long one? Why?

4. Do you think that the cities or the rural sections offer greater encouragement to Christian living? To Christian work?

5. Is geographical or numerical spread an evidence of the strength and worth of Christianity?

6. Are the poor and humble more easily enlisted in the Christian cause? If so, does this detract from the power of the Christian message?

7. What has Christianity to offer the well-to-do, cultured, and prominent persons?

8. What groups are most easily won for Christ to-day? Why?

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CHAPTER VIII

CONTESTING THE FIELD WITH RIVAL CULTS

The early Christians on the defensive. The sources of our study are so confidently positive in so much which they say that casual students have been unaware of the struggle which was incessantly waged with the other religious cults. These did not yield their following without a fight. We should not expect that they would. In the Acts and Epistles windows are opened up on a series of conflicts which are typical. This chapter of our book will treat of these.

Local shrines. Nearly every town and village had its small and convenient shrines at which on occasion the people made their offerings. These shrines were presided over by priests or priestesses whose living came chiefly from these "temples." The deities often took the names of the old Greek or Roman classical gods, although in character they may have been widely different. It was an age of credulity among the masses, and portents or wonders of any kind were eagerly claimed by the shrine-keepers, in order that patronage might be better; and the people usually gave uncritical assent. An illustration of this naïve and popular worship is the story of what happened at Lystra.¹ Under the ministry of Paul and Barnabas a cripple had been made to walk. The announcement was made that these miracle-working men were none other than gods who were visiting the town *incognito*. Barnabas, who was probably large and dignified, was called Jupiter; and Paul, who was small and quick, was given the name of the messenger of the gods, Mercury. The priests of the local shrine eagerly claimed the miracle and at once prepared to capitalize it. It was with the greatest difficulty that the apostles shook off this claim; and only a little later, probably the next day,

¹ Acts 14. 8ff.

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when it became evident that they were a liability rather than an asset to the town shrine, Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city, being thought dead. Such struggles must have been of frequent occurrence.

The Sorcerers. In Galatians 5.19-21 Paul is giving the list of the "works of the flesh." Prominent among these is "sorcery." He and his fellow missionaries knew what it was to come into conflict with the religious mountebanks of that day. An instance is given us in Acts 19.13-20. Disease of every kind was usually ascribed to the work of demons. In fact, "demons" about took the place of "germs" in our own day. The work of demon-expulsion, or "exorcism," was a lucrative practice. If one could add to this the sale of certain charms or amulets, which when carried on the person would ward off misfortune of every kind, and sell charm-books, or "Ephesian Letters," as they were called, whereby each man could learn how to take care of himself in a danger-filled world, business would be good. The Christian preachers met this popular practice by simply setting aside the current pantheon, and in the name of Jesus, expelling the demons and healing the sick. Now, two of these popular pagan practitioners, seeing the power of the Christians, added the name of Jesus to the list of magic words or names by which they did their cures. But the man on whom they tried it, being presumably the mouthpiece for the indwelling demons, said: "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" Then, the demons becoming frantic, the man leaped upon and tore the clothing off the men, so that they beat a terrified retreat. The Christian community was so imperfectly evangelized that when the terror of false profession came upon them they brought in from their own homes, probably, and offered for burning, books of magic and charms to the value of 50,000 pieces of silver—equal probably to \$7,500. Doubtless such conflicts were not uncommon.

Magicians. In this list we have two examples given in the Acts—that of Elymas, or Bar Jesus,² and that of

² Acts 13. 8.

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Simon Magus.³ These men were each in popular authority. They seem to have belonged to a class who were more than ordinarily skilled in the partial science of their time, were members of a more-or-less organized fraternity, and by reason of their superior knowledge and place in society became formidable opponents of Christianity, having a system which persisted long after the church had triumphantly moved past the first two types of opposition named. Simon was said to be "that power of God which is called Great." He not only knew his own tricks, but was willing to join the church and pay good money to learn any new ones—so denominated in his own mind—that the apostles might teach. Elymas at once recognized Paul as a dangerous foe, and both Paul and Peter were vehement in their denunciation of these men. The traditions of the second century make Simon Magus to be the great leader of one of the most bitter and unprincipled wars against Christian truth. It was very formidable because of its use of "science" and because of an effective organization.

The "Mysteries." In Acts 19. 23-41 we have a lengthy description of one battle with an outstanding type of paganism—the Hellenistic religions of redemption, commonly known as the "Mystery Religions." The particular goddess is called Diana or Artemis. She has little in common with the Greek goddess of that name, but was, rather, related in type to the Phrygian goddess Cybele. She was the "Great Mother" of all living. The religion had its story of a consort to the mother-god who died and rose again. In the ritual of this religion this deity was thought of as dying with the autumn and rising with the spring. Such religions are often called "vegetation" cults. There was an elaborate and colorful ritual following the seasons. Men found satisfaction for their love of emotion, got promise of salvation and hope of a happy immortality in the life to come. Moreover, the "Great Mother" gave promise of fertility to the fields and orchards, and in Ephesus was the patronizing deity of the city. Here was

³ Acts 8. 9ff.

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erected a great temple which enshrined the meteorite (a "stone from heaven"), which was also used as a spacious theater, a place of deposit of valuables, and an asylum for any oppressed, who were by law not to be touched while in the temple grounds. Also the craftsmen made images of the statue to Diana (silver and terra-cotta ones have been recovered) and a flourishing business resulted. The whole rabble of temple ministrants and servants lived upon the income of the place, and twice in the account it is stated that this worship extended through "all Asia." The Christian movement, without directly attacking, had made great inroads upon the income of those who lived from this religion. At root the trouble was economic, but an economic campaign joined with religious frenzy would be more formidable! In praying to their deities the pagans frequently hoped to gain favor by repeating over and over again the name of their god. So here they rushed into the theater and held a prayer meeting of two hours' length, shouting "*Great Diana of the Ephesians!*" The advice given by Paul's friends, that he should not enter into the theater, nor try to answer, was doubtless wise, for in their madness these pagans probably would have torn him to pieces. Here was a strong contender for the religious field, and notably so because the type was spread throughout the empire under one name or another. It also promised, in part, the very benefits offered by Christianity, and in some notable respects resembled it in doctrine.

Gnosticism. The Acts gives no account of conflict with Gnostic thinkers. This battle became more acute in the second century. Certain references in Colossians, however (John also), are clearly to systems of this type, and the First Epistle of John is chiefly an anti-Gnostic writing. The Gnostics were those religionists who claimed information concerning the nature of God, of the material universe, and of man, by "gnosis," sometimes translated "knowledge," but more correctly "revelation." By this they claimed superior wisdom. They had struggled with a problem which still vexes us: "How could a good God make such a bad world?" And they had found their

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answer: "He didn't!" This material world is the product of an inferior creative power, and not the *Good God*. Hence, all the material world is evil, man's body included. So, in order to attain to goodness there must be the most rigid asceticism, punishing the body and subduing it. Others, conceiving the "flesh" as incurably wicked, allowed all kinds of bodily excesses, hoping to save their spirits only. The Good God could not come into contact with this evil world directly, so it was necessary to have a system of intermediary "angels" or "æons," thirty or more in number, by means of which enlightened men might climb to the true God. Some sects of Gnostics divided mankind into three groups—the purely material; the "soulish," or animal; and the "gnostic," or spiritual. By this means they accounted for the uneven response a good message gets from any presentation. They erected a kind of perfectionism, and they were the superior ones, inviting those who had made beginnings to "go on to perfection." Thus there came into the church a false teaching at once theological and practical. It was one of the purposes of the Colossian epistle to make a clear case for Christianity against this. God was said to create the world through Christ.⁴ Christ stands in the place of every other intermediary of whatever kind. He possesses all the fullness.⁵ He has despoiled principalities and powers. There is to be no humiliation or worshiping of angels.⁶ There is to be no showing of "wisdom" in will worship, and humility and severity to the body. Christians are to "put off" the old man, and to "put on" the new man.⁷ They are to "seek the things which are above, where Christ is." In the First Epistle of John those who say "we have no sin,"⁸ or who deny that Jesus came "in the flesh,"⁹ or who do not "walk even as he walked"¹⁰ are bitterly condemned. If the early church could have been drawn into the Gnostic net, Christianity probably would have perished in the first centuries after Christ.

⁴ Col. 1. 10.

⁵ Col. 1. 19; 2. 9.

⁶ Col. 2. 18.

⁷ Col. 3. 5, 12.

⁸ 1 John 1. 8.

⁹ 1 John 4. 2.

¹⁰ 1 John 2. 6.

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Philosophy. Philosophy in the first century of the Christian era had become less exclusively speculative and more inclined toward religion. As already stated in Chapter I, some of the noblest sentiments in any literature are to be found in the writings of these men who were contemporary with early Christianity. Many who at least called themselves philosophers preached and taught popularly, affirming themselves led by the gods to correct the morals of the people of their generation. In many particulars the lists of vices and virtues taught by them corresponded to the Christian ideal. Possibly the Areopagites in Athens had greater interest in Paul's preaching than they showed. At least one of their number believed. But on the whole they held the Christians in contempt. They believed in salvation by long struggle and rigorous self-discipline. The Christians claimed to have attained to it at once by faith in God through Christ, the Redeemer. The philosophers welcomed to their circle only those whose previous lives would recommend them. With the Christians, "whosoever would might come." The Christian way was too easy to be true, and the company so humble in its origins as to be heartily despised. It was not until the middle of the second century that the philosophers were won, and it was then that there appeared the notable defensive writings of such men as Justin and Aristides, and a little later, the Christian systems of Clement of Alexandria and Origen.

The Imperial Cult. Mention already has been made in Chapter VI of the conflict of the government with the Christian movement. It was no small matter that toward the end of the first century it became evident that Christianity set at naught all the religions of the empire. The government wished to encourage religion; it served as a quieting measure where people were disposed to be riotous. As a sort of super-religion binding them all together, they encouraged the worship of the emperor. The Christians were called *atheists*, for, indeed, they denied all the gods. While, a great part of the time, the government officials simply overlooked the omission, Christianity had no legal right as a religion before the Edict of Milan, 313 A. D.

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How the Christians met these various cults. While we do not have in our sources any detailed statement of the technique developed in the contests with paganism several items stand out clearly enough to be distinguished.

Uncompromising intolerance. Christianity had "the courage of its disbeliefs." Narrow was the way which led to life. The Jews before them had made a record for clannishness and exclusiveness. The Christians were even more aloof. Not only was there but one God, there was only one Mediator, Jesus Christ.¹¹ Baptism was the funeral service of the old life.¹² They either drank the cup of the Lord or the cup of demons.¹³ In the Mysteries a man might be initiated into several cults and add the imperial cult. Not so with Christians. If a man were a Christian, he was nothing else religiously.

Attitude toward other Gods. An idol was "nothing in the world." Even then, meats offered to idols were not to be touched if thereby a weak conscience was offended.¹⁴ The *reality* of some of the pagan deities was not denied, but they were classified as demons, principalities, powers, "rulers of this darkness."¹⁵ These were all subdued and powerless before Christ; and to the true Christian, as powerless as though they did not exist. So those who in paganism had feared the demons and wrathful gods were now in peace, having full victory over that which previously enslaved them, and in time came to forget entirely or disbelieve completely in their existence. Their only danger was in turning back to those "weak and beggarly elements."

Adaptation to contemporary needs and modes of thought. It is noteworthy that practically every religion, even the most weird and wild, promised some good, and offered some coveted help. Here Christianity and these religions had common ground, and there was a tendency to use those words, and adopt similar methods to those by which the other cults made their contribution. The thousands who had come in from paganism would more

¹¹ Col. 1. 20.

¹⁴ Rom. 14. 21.

¹² Rom. 6. 4.

¹⁵ Eph. 6. 12.

¹³ 1 Cor. 10. 21.

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easily understand the categories with which they had been familiar from youth. Did the exorcists expel demons with a formula? Christians did it with a word of command. Could Elymas work wonders? Paul would confuse the wonder-worker. Did the Mysteries have secret rites of initiation? Every Christian was baptized and this rite came to have profound significance—"Ye have put on Christ"! Did they have communal meals? So did the Christians have their memorial of eating. Did the patriot-religionists called the emperor "Lord"? In time "every tongue was to confess that Jesus Christ was *Lord*." Did the Gnostics prate of "wisdom," and "light," and "fullness"? Jesus was "wisdom from God," the "Light of the World," and in him "all things consist." If they spoke of "full-growth"—every man was to be presented "perfect in Christ." The Stoics spoke of the "logos," of the "sufficiency of virtue," of "universal brotherhood," and a "universal fatherhood." These and many other ideas were good Christian terms, and were made the vehicle for conveying the Christian evangel to the Pagan-Gentile peoples in an understandable language.

That Christianity seized upon and adapted to its use much of Jewish ideas and practice is common knowledge. That the early preachers made like use of that in pagan systems which met their need is equally true.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Tell what happened at Lystra.
2. Give an account of the riot at Ephesus.
3. Why do we have the word "simony" in our present language?
4. What was the type of the "Mystery religions"?
5. How did the early Christians make use of the ideas and categories of other religions?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What have we gained in ceasing to think of disease as caused by demons, and adopting the germ-theory instead?

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2. If modern Christians were to make a bonfire of hurtful books, what should be placed on the pile?

3. What are the chief differences between religion and magic?

4. Is it probable that Christian ritual, ideals, or theology will be enriched by contact with present-day non-Christian faiths?

5. How do you explain so much of evil in a world where we conceive of a good God as present?

6. Might the Christians not have been a little more yielding without surrender, thus escaping much persecution?

7. What does Christianity have that cannot be found in other religions?

8. How might the world be different to-day had a polytheistic religion prevailed?

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CHAPTER IX

INWARD STRUGGLES—GROWING PAINS

Going on toward perfection. A certain famous preacher, after reading through the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and then noting that in the address it had been sent to "the church of God which is at Corinth, *even* them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus,"¹ called them "*imperfect* saints." Rightly so, and yet, in the mind of Paul, that turbulent church had life, and it was going on to sainthood. It is thus with every church. Struggle and even friction are complete disproof of death and when looked upon with kindly and patient eyes they are harbingers of hope. For what are difficulties for, save to be overcome! The early church had its growing pains. What were they?

The race problem. Two phases of racial conflict appear. The first was when the widows of the Gentile proselytes complained that in the distribution of alms, they got less than those of the Palestinian group.² This outbreak was soon quieted by the appointment—through popular choice—of "men of good report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom," who should have charge of this matter. We do not hear of it again. The second outbreak had to do with the admission of the Gentiles on brotherly terms with the Jews into the Christian Church. This has already been discussed at some length in Chapter IV and need not be repeated. It should only be shown in relation to this great subject that Paul did two very definite things:

1. He thought the matter through and announced the principle: "Ye are all sons of God, through faith in Christ Jesus. . . . There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no

¹ 1 Cor. 1. 2.

² Acts 6. 1.

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male and female; for ye all are one *man* in Christ Jesus.”³ Nothing could be fairer nor more like Jesus.

2. He set about to put the principle into action in his life and work. He reproved Peter to his face when he dissembled.⁴ He took for his own helpers Timothy, a man of mixed race, and Titus, who was a Gentile.⁵ He organized churches which included as a matter of course both groups. He tried to wipe off the line of separation between Jerusalem and the rest of the world, by having the Gentiles give a noble offering for the poor in Jerusalem,⁶ and took delegates along to represent the givers in person. He did not win the Jerusalem church, but he did succeed in establishing Christian communities elsewhere free from race distinctions, and these churches set the standard for the first century.

“Incompatibility of temperament.” Not all the leaders of the early church found it easy to work together. Judging from Paul’s rebuke of Peter and the subsequent decision that Peter should go to those of the circumcision and Paul to the Gentiles,⁷ they could do their best work apart. John Mark’s withdrawal from Barnabas and Paul, and Paul’s subsequent refusal to take him on a second journey showed lack of easy co-operation.⁸ The “sharp contention” of Paul and Barnabas, and the fact that the church gave its blessing to Paul and his party,⁹ show rather heated differences of opinion. What does it mean? Only this: that often really great men, simply because of their habit of leadership, find it difficult to agree. Not all good men always see eye to eye on plans or personalities. These early workers, instead of fighting it out, agreed to disagree, each fully respecting the other. It is possible to *love* everybody, but we cannot always *like* them nor find them congenial!

The struggle with tradition. There were several aspects of the struggle of the new with the old. Probably as good an illustration as any is the discussion regard-

³ Gal. 3. 26, 28.

⁴ Gal. 2. 11.

⁵ Acts 16. 1-2; Gal. 2. 3.

⁶ 1 Cor. 16. 1.

⁷ Gal. 2. 9.

⁸ Acts 13. 13; 15. 37.

⁹ Acts 15. 39-40.

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ing the Old Testament Scriptures. That Paul found in these writings the voice of God cannot be doubted from his frequent and powerful quotations. Yet, when his legalistic friends insisted upon the imposition of the Jewish ritual and ceremonial law upon Gentile converts, Paul saw that it would be a contradiction of the law of love and grace as shown in Christ. So he frankly did not require these rules. When the Judaizers tried to force them, Paul hotly fought back. When they tried to compel him to the literal observance of the whole law, he went so far as to say that Christ had redeemed us from the "curse of the law."¹⁰ Then he was accused of being against the whole law.¹¹ Paul does not here state a principle and we must analyze his attitude:

1. He recognized the prophetic voice in much of the Old Testament, and never ceased to use it as a message from God.

2. He saw clearly that the ritual and ceremonial parts—indeed, the whole concept of *must*—were at variance with his revelation of God's free love as shown in Christ.

3. Thus his use of the Scripture was prophetic, discriminating, Christlike.

To us now it seems strange that they all could not have seen alike in this, but there grew up a party who separated from Paul and stuck for the whole tradition. In time they disappeared. The forward-looking and prophetic group became the Christian Church. Their devotion to progress had saved the life of the movement.

Sectarianism. The natural love of independence never permits of complete unity unless it be upon a very broad basis. We have two accounts of sectarian strife—in one the rift was complete, in the other probably healed. Those who are familiar with the preceding lessons will remember that the Judaizing controversy really resulted in two sects—indeed, almost two denominations—in the early church. The reason for this unhappy outcome seems to have been that they tried to come to agreement in small details rather than to center their thoughts upon the great

¹⁰ Gal. 3. 13.

¹¹ Rom. 7. 7.

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common features of their religion. Each group did its part, doubtless, but it was a pity that they had to work apart, and that in certain ways there were bitterness and rivalry between them. The second uprising of sectarian spirit was at Corinth. Here they had known three preachers, each different in type, and each had his following. It is very probable that each of the three men was annoyed to have a sect taking his name, but here they are: some are of Peter, some of Apollos and some of Paul.¹² There seems to be a small group who will not be led into this partisanism and so, possibly, with more pride than any other division, announce that they are "of Christ." Now, to have discussed the respective merits of the eloquent Apollos, the impulsive Peter, or the logical Paul would have been, to say the least, embarrassing. Paul earnestly declined to lead a party, and Peter and Apollos would probably have done likewise had they been present. But Paul does more: he gets them to think of what they had in common, and of the interdependence of all. After pointing out the childishness of sectarianism (and is it not so!) he comes to the reconciling principle: "Wherefore let no one glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."¹³ On this high level differences were eclipsed and unity triumphed over discord; their difficulties were not "settled"; they were *transcended*.

Local strife. Some preachers have facetiously referred to their church officers as the "officious board." In most cases this would be a misnomer, but from Paul's day until ours a few good people in official position have needed reconciliation. What a flood of light the story of Euodia and Syntyche¹⁴ would give, if we knew the whole of it! How easily petty differences may estrange good friends! Paul says that these women are not to be condemned, but, rather, he commands, "Help these women." He

¹² 1 Cor. 1. 12.

¹³ 1 Cor. 3. 21-22.

¹⁴ Phil. 4. 2-3.

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insists that their virtues be remembered: "They labored with me in the gospel." He does not unchristianize them—"Whose names are in the book of life." But how shall their differences be obviated? He does not suggest that they discuss the merits and demerits of their respective positions nor that they call in a committee, but his prescription is like the one noticed before. "I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord." He says, in effect, that they are for the time to neglect their differences and find some important thing in which they are both interested, and that together they are to "mind" that. Wise Paul! He knew that if this should be done, they would *forget* the trifles which separated them. After all, most of our differences in church work have to do with private opinions rather than fundamental principles.

Insubordination. A theological student, upon being asked regarding the favorite sport in his institution, replied that it was "bishop-baiting." If so, the school was running true to human type, for those who are not in office can most readily see how things should be improved by the leaders, and are most free in their criticism of those who outrank them. This becomes especially true of any who have been in any way disciplined or even corrected. The early church had its most glaring illustration of this habit in the Corinthians. It seems to have been the most eruptive of all the Pauline group, and poured out its spleen upon the apostle who had been pouring out his life for it. He was accused of trying to lord it over their faith.¹⁵ They said that his letters had only caused sorrow.¹⁶ That coming to them he had brought no letters of commendation.¹⁷ That he walked in craftiness, and handled the word of God deceitfully.¹⁸ That he was beside himself;¹⁹ that when present he was lowly, but when absent, was courageous in his letters, and would terrify them.²⁰ That he was not a chief apostle,²¹ that he was

¹⁵ 2 Cor. 1. 24.

¹⁶ 2 Cor. 2. 2.

¹⁷ 2 Cor. 3. 1.

¹⁸ 2 Cor. 4. 2.

¹⁹ 2 Cor. 5. 13.

²⁰ 2 Cor. 10. 1, 11.

²¹ 2 Cor. 11. 5.

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rude in speech,²² that he had asked for money,²³ that he did not love them,²⁴ that he had not the ecstatic experience of some others,²⁵ that being crafty he caught them with guile,²⁶ that Titus, his helper, had taken advantage of them.²⁷ Such were the charges to which running and vigorous reply is given in Second Corinthians. It was enough to discourage the stoutest-hearted saint, and Paul admitted that he had been in heaviness of spirit regarding them, but he never gave them up. He reasoned and prayed with and for them, and in the end came out to full reconciliation. See 2 Corinthians 7. 8-16, closing with the words, "I rejoice that in everything I am of good courage concerning you." Insubordination then, as now, often marks the declaration of independence of adolescent spirits, and when properly understood and dealt with, loses itself in the masculine vigor of full adulthood.

The struggle with downright meanness. Some will say, "But we thought that the early church was a model in every respect." It was, very much after the "model" of present-day churches. So just as certain vices creep into our churches, they also had them. This time we turn to First Corinthians as our most convenient illustrative matter. Here is what we find: They were conceited.²⁸ They were quarrelsome and had each other arrested.²⁹ Some of them were guilty of sins of sex too vile to repeat,³⁰ and the church was not grieved as it should have been; some were careless in their associates,³¹ some actually got drunk at the sacramental feasts.³² No, it was not easy navigating for the man who would pilot such a ship. It must not be understood that a majority or even a great number were of this kind; but the Christians in Corinth had in many cases come into the church from low levels in society.

Paul vigorously opposes these evils. In some cases he

²² 2 Cor. 11. 6.

²³ 2 Cor. 11. 9.

²⁴ 2 Cor. 11. 11.

²⁵ 2 Cor. 12. 1.

²⁶ 2 Cor. 12. 16.

²⁷ 2 Cor. 12. 18.

²⁸ 1 Cor. 1. 20.

²⁹ 1 Cor. 6. 1.

³⁰ 1 Cor. 5. 1.

³¹ 1 Cor. 5. 11.

³² 1 Cor. 11. 21.

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insists that the Christian community withdraw fellowship from them; but most interesting it is, that even in the case of the most vile, he hopes that by giving his flesh over to the devil—whatever that may mean—*his soul may be saved*.³³ Paul's motto for every difficult case seemed to be "Never give up."

Fanaticism. The margin between mental balance and fanaticism or lunacy is difficult either to measure or to define. Cranks and erratics get into every organization, and among them, into the church. From the beginning until now they have been an exceptional embarrassment for two reasons. First, they are often fully sincere and must not be treated as impostors; and second, excepting for their odd notion, they are often among the best persons we know—self-sacrificing, devoted and sincere to the limit. The early church had its share. There were astrol-ogers, with their observance of days, months, and years.³⁴ There was religious vegetarianism,³⁵ which dreaded to eat anything other than herbs, lest it might cut in on some soul in process of transmigration. There were those who had a dread and dislike of marriage,³⁶ and chief among all the annoying groups there were those who spoke with tongues.³⁷ Any fanatic is always vocal; these were vociferous, tumultuously and wildly so.

Now, what should be done with these off-side people? Certainly, they could not be met by direct frontal attack. They were sincere and not to be insulted or injured. Paul's method seemed to have a threefold process. First, he sought to get their minds off the less important side-lines and upon great issues. Probably not one in ten of our church people has ever noticed that the wonderful chapter on love, 1 Corinthians 13, was written specially to help the fanatical and ecstatic tongue-speakers. Does it not begin with, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels"? We shall always have this to thank the tongue-speakers for. Second, by frankly acknowledging that there was some value in their specialty, he was

³³ 1 Cor. 5. 5.

³⁴ Gal. 4. 10.

³⁵ Rom. 14. 2.

³⁶ 1 Cor. 7. 25.

³⁷ 1 Cor., chapter 14 entire.

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able to classify it with other things of the Spirit, and put it in its proper place. Notice that in the list of the gifts of the Spirit,³⁸ "tongues" comes last. Third, Paul held rigorously to the rules, "Let all things be done decently and in order,"³⁹ and "Let all things be done unto edifying."⁴⁰ Such ways of handling peculiar people would seem better than to try to argue them out of their oddity or to exclude them because they are uncomfortably different. There are few things more unpleasant than a fanatic, but many which are really more hurtful.

Thus the early church had its struggles, and in its struggling acquired patience, and strength, and wisdom, thus transmuting them into *growing pains*.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. In what ways did the race problem appear in the early church?
2. In what ways did Paul resolve this difficulty?
3. What incompatibility of temperament appeared, according to the Acts?
4. What seemed the best solution to make?
5. What two examples of sectarian strife are given? What was the outcome of each? Why?
6. What three points can be given regarding Paul's attitude toward the Old Testament Scriptures?
7. Tell of the struggle with insubordination in the Corinthian church.
8. What were some of the vices which crept into the early church?
9. How did Paul advise concerning them?
10. What types of fanaticism appeared?
11. What was Paul's method of handling the tongue-speaking fanatics?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. May the imperfections of the early church serve

³⁸ 1 Cor. 12. 28.

³⁹ 1 Cor. 14. 40.

⁴⁰ 1 Cor. 14. 26.

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rather to discourage or to encourage the church of our day? Why?

2. Are the matters which divide Protestantism into numerous sects really fundamental, or only incidental? If the latter, why do we stay apart?

3. What should be our attitude toward "conventions" which have come down to us?

4. What are some of the really mean and wrong things which some Christians practice in our day, and which should be put away?

5. What are the best methods of overcoming evil? Name three.

6. "The difference between a hobby-horse and a real horse is that you can get off the real one." Is this true?

7. What real fanatics have you known?

8. Is fanaticism or formalism the greater danger to present-day Christianity?

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CHAPTER X

THE MAKING OF A LITERATURE

The religion of a book. Christianity had its rise in Judaism, and Judaism had a book—or, rather, a library—in its hand. This library had been translated into Greek; for there were many of the sons of Abraham who could not read the Hebrew, and besides, many Gentiles used the Greek Old Testament. So it was the Septuagint, as the translation was called (because of the tradition that the translation had been made by seventy men), which was the Bible of Paul and his followers.

The value of the Greek Old Testament. It is difficult for us adequately to appreciate the value of this literature to the early Christians. There was a popular tendency to value authority rather than to do original thinking. Here were books hallowed with prophetic voices, priestly ritual, and wisdom sayings, which had been made the sacred writings of those who had called themselves the "People of God" for more than a millennium. There was a tendency also to revere antiquity. Moses antedated the most ancient history of the Romans or the earliest of the philosophers of Greece, and the Christians were quick to see and to claim this advantage. Moreover, the prophecies adumbrated the ideals and words of Jesus, and by liberal use of various methods of interpretation, chiefly allegorical, they proved that Jesus' coming, his life, teaching, death, and resurrection were foretold throughout the Old Testament writings. Finally, the ideals of much of the Old Testament came over into Christian use without change. The idea of God, the prophetic Spirit, the ethical urge, all were here. There was no need of translation. There was no need to learn a new language as modern missionaries do. It was ready, right at their hand. Its psalms were sung and its words became the textbook in every congregation. The reading of these

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books as part of the worship made it easy to add to them the sayings of Jesus when they were written and other apostolic messages of instruction as they appeared.

The earliest Christian writings. The very first Christian documents seem either to have been lost or else absorbed into the later ones which we now have. Papias said that "Matthew wrote the sayings of our Lord in the Hebrew tongue, and others interpreted them as they were able." Luke knows of *many* who had "taken in hand"¹ to write the Christian narrative. Fragments of Gospels, having names other than any now known to us, have been discovered embodied in ancient writings or preserved in the papyri of Egypt. We are quite certain that something like those writings of Matthew is preserved in the teaching sections of the Gospel According to Matthew and the Gospel According to Luke. We hope that nothing of real consequence has been lost.

Paul's letters earliest in our present New Testament. When Paul wrote he knew that his letters had importance. In at least one case,² he explicitly asks that the letter be sent on, to be read in another church. And it is quite probable that copies of letters written for one church were sent to others, as Romans and Ephesians. But that he thought that he was writing a document which should have its place along with the sacred writings of the Old Testament is highly improbable; yet, while making use of the Old Testament, Paul depended much more upon what he believed to be the very voice of the Spirit to him,³ and so these letters were written on a plane and with an exalted confidence quite different from ordinary friendly communications.

Each letter a problem study. Paul's letters were not upon subjects of his own choosing. Each was a study of a problem or problems present in some particular church or group of churches, and requiring careful and instant attention. They are forged on the anvil and in the heat of actual contact and conflict with live issues.

¹ Luke 1. 1.

² Col. 4. 16.

³ Gal. 1. 11-12; 1 Cor. 7. 40.

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Galatians. The Epistle to the Galatians was written because, in the name of a more perfect Christianity, his converts were being Judaized.⁴ For them to take a position of dependence upon any legal form or ritual was the negation of the doctrine of Grace. To become legalized was to become despiritualized, and this would have been the end of Christianity. Paul saw the logical significance of this. The heated and vehement way in which he attacks the enemies who were nullifying his work makes this the most fierce and tumultuous of all Paul's work.

Thessalonians. There are four items here: Paul's friends were under bond that he should not return there, as his presence led to rioting.⁵ The Christians had undergone persecution of the most severe kind.⁶ They were disturbed by the fact that some of their friends had died, and would not be present when Jesus should return.⁷ Some were so certain of the Lord's imminent return that they had given up working, expecting to live upon their fellow Christians until the New Age dawned.⁸ All these things Paul had to set in order as best he could. There are two letters. Some have thought that the first one was not quite clear, and that the second was written to say the same things more explicitly. Others have advanced the hypothesis that there were two churches in this great city—one in the Jewish section and one among the Gentiles—and that we have a letter to each.

Corinthians. First Corinthians is really a second letter, as in it we have reference to a previous communication.⁹ This second letter shows that they have stated difficulties and raised questions which they wished the apostle to discuss. These questions range through a wide field: going to law, marriage and divorce, how to behave in church, spiritual gifts, the resurrection, the collection, and so forth. Second Corinthians baffles all attempt to find a sequence running throughout it. Most students now agree that in it we have fragments of not less than three letters given chiefly to reconciling a riotous church to its apos-

⁴ Gal. 1. 6ff.

⁵ Acts 17. 9.

⁶ 1 Thess. 2. 14.

⁷ 1 Thess. 4. 13ff.

⁸ 2 Thess. 3. 10.

⁹ 1 Cor. 5. 11.

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tolie founder. (See Chap. VIII.) What we have was written in deep and, for the most part, tender feeling, and so we have here more beautiful passages, which are often quoted, than in any other Pauline writing.

Romans. Here we have a letter written to prepare the way for his coming to Rome.¹⁰ Chiefly he will have to do with two classes: First, there will be the Jews and Judaizing Christians, who will raise the questions with which the Epistle to the Galatians struggles. Also the Gentiles, with their more philosophical ways, and with their problem of how they might become Christians and still maintain loyalty to the empire. This Epistle is written coolly, dispassionately. It is said to have influenced Christian theology more than any book of the Bible. It seems probable that it was so valuable that copies were made for churches elsewhere. It has been conjectured that to the copy sent to Ephesus he appended the postscript now found in the sixteenth chapter, and that the text which came down to us was made from this Ephesian copy. At any rate, after the formal ending with benediction and "Amen" at the end of the fifteenth chapter, there is a letter of introduction and a long list of greetings to Ephesian friends in chapter sixteen.

Colossians. This book seems to have been written to set the Colossian church at rights concerning the strange teaching which Epaphras, possibly their elder, had reported to Paul in Rome. To do this, he sets Jesus the Christ in an exalted place in their thinking.

Ephesians. This Epistle so much resembles Colossians that some have thought that it was written by someone else, possibly a disciple of Paul. It seems more probable that it is a more careful discussion of the same heresies, which was prepared as an encyclical to the churches in all Asia Minor, whither this heretical teaching had come. It is to be observed that there are no greetings at the end. The margin¹¹ assures us that some texts of this Epistle did not carry the direction to Ephesus. It would seem that our copy came from a Greek original which went to Ephesus.

¹⁰ Rom. 1. 10-11.

¹¹ Eph. 1. 1.

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Philippians. Here is a letter of gratitude to a generous church which has at least three times sent relief to Paul. He is in prison, but his joy bursts forth. He takes occasion also to attempt the reconciliation of Euodia and Syntyche, who have come into conflict. He reports the progress of the gospel in the city of his imprisonment.

Philemon. The occasion of this letter is clear. A runaway slave who has wronged his master falls into Paul's gospel net and it is discovered that he is the property of a personal friend. He is sent back to his owner with this tender and personal letter.

The "Pastoral" Epistles. First Timothy, Second Timothy, and Titus are thus called because they contain instructions for pastoral work. Much of it seems clearly to belong to a period later than Paul. Many scholars believe we have here a Pauline nucleus which has been rewritten as occasion required. Such letters are extremely valuable as showing the pastoral ideal of the first century.

Mark. This Gospel seems to have come from Rome. Tradition has it that John Mark had been Peter's helper there, and that here we have a characteristically Petrine book—full of action, eager, omitting much and rushing quickly to its close. This was earlier than Matthew and Luke, and was probably much used as a missionary document.

Matthew. The group for whom this book was written is easily identified. The Jewish Christians, seeing the Gentiles rapidly preponderating in the church, naturally wished to know the relation of the New to the Old Covenant. Matthew opens his story with Abraham, and at many places attempts to show how the new faith simply fulfills the old. Using Mark's Gospel as a framework, he writes a life of Jesus which makes it clear that the Jews are out because of their willful rejection of the Messiah. With this he weaves in great teaching sections such as chapters 5, 6, 7, 13, and 25.

Luke. The author to whom this name has been given was probably a Gentile. He knew at least of Mark's Gospel, for he uses it much. He knew of other fragmentary attempts at a life of Jesus. He wanted to write an orderly,

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a historical, and a universal story of Jesus. He wrote it as long as a "book" of his day could conveniently be, and produced a writing which has been called "The Most Beautiful Book Ever Written."

John. This Gospel comes out of Asia Minor, where the tradition of the apostle was vigorous. It was written near the close of the century, after two generations of Christian living and thinking. It begins with a prologue calculated to attract those whose training had involved Gnosticism or philosophy. The writer has much material not used in the other Gospels, and makes no use of a great deal that they included; feeling, perhaps, that it would not best serve his purpose, which seems to have been to write a Gospel for Christians of Greek ancestry.

The Acts. This book, written about fifty years after the death of Jesus, seeks first to make clear to the Christian communities, now spread widely through Asia Minor and southern Europe, how the expansion of their religion came about, as it enlarged its place from Jerusalem to Rome, the center of empire. Another purpose seems to have been apologetic. A careful study of the book will show that the author sensed the danger of collision between his religious group and his government, and made a book calculated to show the excellence and the loyalty to Rome of the Christians, and of the fair-minded justice characteristic of the Roman officials with whom the Christians had to do. The only exception was Philip, whom his own government removed from office for bribery. Doubtless the book did much toward accomplishing its end, and in addition it gave us many biographical facts about his hero, the apostle Paul.

Circulating the books. It was thus that these and the remaining books of our New Testament grew up out of actual life situations. Each one, at the time of its writing, met some need or problem. So helpful were these letters that copies were requested by other churches. As previously stated, in some cases Paul planned that his letters should be read by more than one church. The four Gospels, which were at first circulated separately, were united to give a combined message, and by their combined superi-

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ority crowded the fragmentary earlier Gospels out of use. They with the Epistles quite early came to be read as supplementary to the Old Testament, and were then placed alongside of it, both in authority and esteem.

A New Testament "canon." As the various Christian writings appeared, gradually by elimination and combination there were chosen a group of books which were in use in practically all the churches, and so helpful to all as to be regarded as inspired. The chief ones, in use most widely, were the four Gospels and the ten Paulines. They may be said to have been generally adopted by the end of the first century. They were all believed to have apostolic authorship or sanction.

Gradually the other books of our New Testament came into acceptance, and some which are not now included were dropped. During the second and third centuries, when theological controversy became intense and bitter, the church sought a basis of authority in these writings and so officially determined a list which might be used as Christian Scriptures in discussion. As we have seen, a major portion of this list was determined by use by the end of the first century, but the "canon," or list, was not closed officially until the fourth century, and then by reason of the strife with heretical teachers and the desire for scripture proof-texts with which to rout them.

Determining factors. There were six determining factors, then, in this forming of a literature:

1. The example and value of the Old Testament.
2. An actual situation, which the leaders sought to solve by a letter which tried to give an answer harmonious with the Spirit of Christ.
3. A book so helpful that it came into further and then into general use.
4. A collection, larger or smaller, of such rolls in the scripture-chest of each church.
5. These collections by exchange of copies becoming nearly coextensive.
6. Controversy, making urgent the determination of a set list for polemical purposes, leading to the official closing of the canon.

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QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. What is the "Septuagint"?
2. What was its value to early Christianity?
3. What were probably the earliest Christian writings, and what has become of them?
4. Name the ten Pauline Epistles and give the occasion of the writing of each.
5. With the name of what apostle has the Gospel according to Mark been associated? What are its characteristics?
6. For whom, and why, was the Gospel according to Matthew written?
7. What are the characteristics of the Gospel according to Luke?
8. Which of the gospel writers made use of Mark as a source?
9. Compare the Gospel according to John with the other three Gospels. Why the difference?
10. How were the earliest collections of New Testament books made?
11. How largely were our present New Testament books in use by the end of the first century A. D.?
12. Give the steps in the formation of the New Testament canon.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the advantages and the disadvantages of Christianity being the "religion of a book"?
2. Is it true that other groups than the Christians have had a "classical period" during which their thinkers seem to have moved on a plane which produced a literature which "sets the pace" for subsequent writers of the group? If so, name some of the Greeks of this period? Some of the Latins? Some of the Hebrews?
3. Do you know any book outside the Bible which has a quality which might be called "inspiration"? If so, what is it?
4. Why do moderns know so little about the Bible?
5. Must we accept the Bible as literal truth, binding us in every detail, or may we make allowances for the viewpoint of the time and writers?

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CHAPTER XI

STUFF THAT CREEDS WERE MADE OF

Interpretations of Jesus. The teaching of Jesus touched upon a variety of themes and was vigorously stimulating. While at first glance it may seem simple, it carries implications at once philosophical, ethical, social, and religious-mystical, which not only admit of interpretation, but inevitably invite it. It is doubtful if in the handling of Jesus' material by his followers it gained much in real religious value, but the message of Jesus was applied in new relations and made effective. It was also at times obscured and wrested. At any event, the form into which it was wrought became *set* and it was known as "doctrine."

An open field for truth. The early church had no "system of doctrine" to maintain. In fact, it had no formulas of guidance. It had been forced out of Judaism and left to walk alone. Certain elements would naturally give materials for teaching: they had the Old Testament, and were free to interpret it as they wished; there remained with them the profound impression which Jesus had made upon those who knew him; they had a religious life, full-flowing and in some cases ecstatic; they were brought face to face with thought-provoking situations in life; they had the suggestions made by contemporary religious life around them. Their opinions were not carefully thought out and formulated at once; they *grew up* with the life they sought to explain.

Jesus. Naturally, their most important task was to explain Jesus. First he was thought of as a *man*, Jesus of Nazareth.¹ Then in time they thought of him as a prophetic teacher, and finally by the Jewish Christians he was given the name next to that of Jehovah: "Messiah," or "the Christ."² This claim was substantiated, the early church de-

¹ Acts 2. 22.

² Acts 2. 36.

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clared, by his mighty works and by his resurrection. His death, which was a sticking-point to both Jews and Greeks, was asserted to be a part of the divine plan.³ He was still living, and was to come *speedily*.⁴ He was also called "Son of God."⁵ In contact with Hellenism the title "Messiah" was not significant, so they called him by the name given the emperor in the state religion, and ascribed to the deities of paganism; it was the highest name they knew, and was the word "Lord."⁶ Thus the title became "the Lord Jesus Christ."⁷ Paul made use of all or part of this threefold title as occasion demanded. With Platonic idealism and the Gnostic doctrine of pre-existent intermediaries as a background the Christian teaching of a pre-incarnate Lord⁸ was most acceptable. If pre-existent, then a "Word" or expression of God made flesh.⁹ In the Johannine Epistles, which were written at the end of the century, use is made of allegorical terms such as "light" and "life." The Epistle to the Hebrews calls him "a son" and the effulgence of God's glory.¹⁰ The Epistle to the Colossians said that "it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fullness dwell."¹¹ Paul, being by training a strict monotheist, was careful to show the subordination of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Father.¹² The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews thinks of Jesus in terms of a great high-priest. While the earlier New Testament writers like Paul and Mark do not mention the virgin birth of Jesus, it is definitely stated in Matthew and in Luke, which were written in the second generation after the death of Jesus. The Johannine Epistles make a strong plea for his real humanity,¹³ for there were some who insisted that his "flesh" was only an appearance and not real. Certainly, in the Pauline and post-Pauline books Jesus, the Christ, was given titles and functions belonging to Divinity. They were unable to say what their experience

³ Acts 4. 27-28.

⁴ 1 Thess. 4. 17.

⁵ Rom. 1. 4.

⁶ Phil. 2. 11.

⁷ Phil. 4. 23.

⁸ Phil. 2. 6-7.

⁹ John 1. 14.

¹⁰ Heb. 1. 2-3.

¹¹ Col. 1. 19.

¹² 1 Cor. 15. 27-28.

¹³ 1 John 4. 2-3.

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of life in Christ meant, without using these lofty categories—the loftiest they knew, excepting that of Jehovah himself.

God. The early church did not find the idea of God such a difficult task. They took over from Jesus, as he had taken from the Old Testament, much of the Jewish conception. It had already been thought out for them. No arguments are offered to prove God's existence or his character. He is one, he is King, or supreme. He is paternal, kind, forgiving. The early Christians seem to have put greater emphasis upon his Fatherhood, and to have added the very important suggestion that he was like Christ; that is, revealed in Christ: "That God was in Christ."¹⁴ Moreover, the mystical or indwelling God became a favorite concept from Paul's time on,¹⁵ and in the Johannine writings much stress is laid upon his character as *love*.¹⁶ This attribute of love came to be supreme in the mind of the church.

Man. There is no suggestion of a set doctrine of man in the Gospels. It is taken for granted that he is a child of God,¹⁷ though at times a prodigal. In the Epistles, man's status as a sinner is more fully presented, yet he is responsible and capable of turning to right.¹⁸ Paul, however, in the presence of the awful depravity he met in the Gentile world, and the confirmed bigotry and hypocrisy in the Jewish group, developed a doctrine of sin which was much deeper. He felt there was too much of sin and it was too universal to charge up to willfulness alone. So he taught of "sin which dwelleth in us,"¹⁹ and, looking for a place of origin, found it in Adam.²⁰ This was not taken from the Old Testament nor was it adopted by other New Testament writers. It is found elsewhere only in extra-canonical Jewish literature. Paul was here dealing with the fact of experience, that it is more easy to do wrong than right, even when we see the right. Yet Paul also taught that man was capable of penitence and of forgiveness. Paul's

¹⁴ 2 Cor. 5. 19.

¹⁵ John 14. 20.

¹⁶ John 3. 16; 1 John 4. 8.

¹⁷ Luke 15. 11ff.

¹⁸ Col. 3. 5, 12.

¹⁹ Rom. 7. 17.

²⁰ Rom. 5. 12.

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great thesis was: Man could be made morally triumphant through Christ.²¹ Paul tried to make this clear by using illustrations which were in his day easily understood: that of the Jewish sacrifices on the behalf of those who offered them;²² that of the Roman law court, where accused criminals were acquitted or "justified";²³ that of the Roman family, into which one might be "adopted";²⁴ and that of sacral manumission, where a slave was freed from his servile state by being bought by the god, and was henceforth the property of his divine master.²⁵ Thus, in many ways, some of which, because of changed circumstances, are confusing to us now, the early Christian thinkers sought to make clear that man, even though sinful, could be triumphant through Christ. Throughout the New Testament man's personal immortality is assumed.

The Holy Spirit. God was thought of as making contact with his people through his Spirit. In the earliest church, the Spirit seemed to be regarded as a source of power for service,²⁶ and in persecution.²⁷ The Spirit's presence was frequently made known by ecstatic manifestations.²⁸ In Paul the Spirit has great prominence, and seems to be the indwelling Divine Presence.²⁹ At times the Spirit is called "The Spirit of him that raised up Jesus,"³⁰ or the Spirit of God; at another time the "Spirit of Christ";³¹ at another time the "Holy Spirit,"³² and in one reference he speaks twice of "the Lord the Spirit,"³³ identifying Jesus with the Holy Spirit. Still, he uses the three-fold formula, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in benediction.³⁴ Here we have no studied doctrine of the Spirit, but an exultant and persistent conviction, which Paul is eager to share, *that God will and does actually dwell in men*. It is life rather than studied doctrine. That came later.

²¹ Rom. 8. 37.

²² Rom. 3. 24-25.

²³ Rom. 5. 1.

²⁴ Rom. 8. 15.

²⁵ 1 Cor. 6. 20; Rom. 6. 17-18.

²⁶ Acts 1. 8.

²⁷ Acts 4. 31.

²⁸ Acts 2. 4; 10. 44-46.

²⁹ Rom. 8. 9, 14.

³⁰ Rom. 8. 11.

³¹ Rom. 8. 9.

³² 2 Cor. 13. 14.

³³ 2 Cor. 3. 17-18.

³⁴ 2 Cor. 13. 14.

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Faith. All God's gifts are conditioned upon "faith," according to the teaching of the early church. At first, the idea comprehends a belief in Jesus' resurrection, and an attitude of loyalty to his cause. In Paul's writings it seems to involve the intellect, as believing that Jesus is living and regnant; the will, as a resolution of loyalty to his cause; and the heart, as it was shown in personal trust. The Epistle to the Hebrews³⁵ makes faith to be an adventure, a "betting of the life" on great propositions which, although yet unseen, involved the very character of God. In James, ³⁶ as in Jesus, faith is simple trust in God. In every case it was the conditioning attitude,³⁷ clearing the way for the working of God's love.

Ethics. The major emphasis of early Christianity was on straight living—God was himself pure, truthful, just, and as such was revealed in Jesus, in whom as yet the world, like Pilate, has "found no fault." To those whose religion has chiefly the post-mortem outlook it would be a revelation if they should read through the New Testament, observing the relative proportion of attention given to the life which now is and the life which is to come. The passion of Jesus for righteousness was ever ready to flash forth. And, it must be said, he had less to say about the "weaknesses and follies and half-reported sins of humanity than of the greed, the selfishness and mammon-worship which excite but occasional reprobation." Every one of the New Testament writings has this ideal of Jesus. In the Epistle of James it constitutes the whole message. Even the name of Jesus is mentioned but twice, while the author drives home his attacks against wickedness of every kind, with a poise and reasonableness which are inescapable.

The beginnings of formulated doctrine. About these six centers chiefly the church began its doctrinal teaching. There were numerous additional topics—the end of the age, free-will and predestination, the resurrection of the body, the virgin birth, spiritual gifts, and others which

³⁵ Heb. 11. 4-13.

³⁶ James 1. 5-6.

³⁷ James 1. 7.

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can be easily suggested. It must be carefully noted that among the biblical writers there is not perfect agreement. While in matters which are central they all have a general agreement, there are five or six somewhat distinct doctrinal types to be identified as, the primitive (Jerusalem church), the Pauline, the Johannine, that of James, that of Hebrews, and the Apocalyptic. They were not aware that they were under necessity of absolute agreement. They were in sufficient unity to admit of going forward together. There are in the New Testament a few passages which look like formulated statements of doctrine. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God";³⁸ "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit."³⁹

"He who was manifested in the flesh,

Seen of angels,

Preached among the nations,

Believed on in the world,

Received up in glory."⁴⁰

These are very simple but were probably sufficient for their needs at that time. Such a confession as our simplest creed, first called the "Old Roman Formula" and in its completed form "The Apostles' Creed," did not take form before 150 A. D., nor reach completion until the fourth century. The Nicene Creed was formulated at the Council of Nicæa, 325, and was the first creed whose acceptance was established by world-wide council, and afterward sustained by force.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. What materials for creed-making did the early Christians have?
2. What were some of the views concerning Jesus?
3. From where, chiefly, did they get their views of God? What Christian modifications appear?

³⁸ Matt. 16. 16.

³⁹ 2 Cor. 13. 14.

⁴⁰ 1 Tim. 3. 16.

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4. What was the early Christian teaching concerning man?

5. What was the significance of the Pauline doctrine of the Spirit?

6. What three elements enter into the early Christian idea of faith?

7. In what sense did a *good life* become the chief burden of their teaching?

8. When was the Apostles' Creed first formulated? When completed?

9. When was the Nicene Creed set forth? What two "firsts" can you say about it?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Would it be an advantage for us if we could be free from doctrinal direction and obliged to set up a new formulation for ourselves? Why?

2. If so, out of what materials, experiences, suggestions would we construct it?

3. For our present use, would a longer or a shorter creed be preferable?

4. Is it true that "everybody has a creed, even though it be only a negative one"?

5. Ought a creed to be regarded as a test for admission to membership, a symbol, or a rallying point? If none of these, what?

6. What doctrinal matters press for solution in our own group? In your own experience or life?

7. Is an American theologian correct in saying that the following fundamentals need thinking through and restating for our own day?—the doctrine of God, of Personality of Jesus, of the church, and of the Kingdom? What do these concepts mean to us?

8. How did it happen that the early Christians got on so well without an agreed form of doctrine?

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CHAPTER XII

WHY CHRISTIANITY WON

The religious synthesis. In Chapter VIII there is a discussion of Christianity in its rivalry with other cults; let us continue the discussion. The worship of the Magna Mater had come to Rome during the Punic Wars, introducing a highly colored and emotional type of religious expression into the somewhat cold and formal services of the official Roman religion. In turn the rites of the Great Mother were modified by contact with the West.

At least a hundred years before the Christian era, the religion of Egypt, that of Isis and Serapis, or Osiris, accompanying the spread of Alexandrian cultural influences, established its worship in Asia Minor and Italy. The chief point of strength seems to have been a ritual of extraordinary attractiveness, with processions and plays.

Astrology had permeated the Roman world and probably made its gains because of its noble ideas of deity and of its association with the science of its day. When the priests could so accurately foretell the movements of planets, sun and moon, and the people were made to believe that the lives of men were inseparably connected with the influence of these heavenly bodies, the casting of horoscopes was a lucrative business. Do we not even yet observe the signs of the zodiac, and "thank our lucky stars"?

The Mithraic cult marched with the Roman arms as far as to Britain, proposed a somewhat complete system of theology and set forth a moral battle challenging to any soldier.

The gods had to do with all the "elements"—water, earth, fire, air; there were a generous eclecticism and syncretism everywhere, by which, among the better people, the heat of controversy was avoided; and finally, later, the values of them all were syncretized and philosophized in

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one system known as Neo-Platonism. A distinguished modern scholar pictures the religious situation of this period:

"Let us suppose that in modern Europe the faithful had deserted the Christian churches to worship Allah or Brahma, to follow the precepts of Confucius or Buddha, or to adopt the maxims of the Shinto; let us imagine a great confusion of all the races of the world in which Arabian mullahs, Chinese scholars, Japanese bonzes, Tibetan lamas and Hindu pundits would be preaching fatalism and predestination, ancestor-worship and devotion to a deified sovereign, pessimism and deliverance through annihilation—a confusion in which all those priests would erect temples of exotic architecture in our cities and celebrate their disparate rites therein. Such a dream . . . would offer a pretty accurate picture of the religious chaos in which the ancient world was struggling before the reign of Constantine."¹

So, Christianity did not win because of the "religious void" of its day, nor because the religions existing were moribund or weak.

Economic and social limitations. The early missionaries had not the backing of financially strong "boards" or "societies." While there were a few rich among them, their wealth could not go far toward making any conquests of a pagan world. The Christians lacked the prestige of social or official standing. Economically, socially, politically they were a poor folk. They could build no great churches, nor finance any elaborate processions, nor command the influence of great names.

Yet they triumphed. In thirty years they had spread throughout Asia Minor. By the end of the first century they had made beginnings all around the Mediterranean. At the end of three centuries they had become so numerous and so influential that the government was forced to establish an attitude toward them. Diocletian (302-03) tried to exterminate them, and Constantine, seeing his failure, decided to recognize and join them, thus making

¹ Cumont, Franz, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*. Published by The Open Court Publishing Co., Chicago, pp. 196, 197.

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Christianity the most influential of all the religions in the empire.

Why? Why did it thus win? It is certain that it was not for lack of opposition, nor because of material or political power. Many reasons have been alleged for its success. Herewith is a list, taken from various scholars and set down pretty much at random:

1. The enthusiasm of the early Christians.
2. Their belief in immortality, with future rewards and punishments.
3. The miracles performed.
4. Efficient organization on imperial patterns.
5. The evidence of prophecy fulfilled.
6. Pure lives and heroic deaths of Christians.
7. The backing of the government under Constantine.
8. Tremendous moral force.
9. An admitted historical basis.
10. The new and original spirit of the teaching of Jesus.
11. A noble system of ethics.
12. A sympathetic worship.
13. It was true to the moral sentiments of its age.
14. It corresponded to the religious wants, aims, emotions, hopes and fears, of its own time.
15. The personality of its founder.
16. It came at a strategic time.
17. Its intolerance.
18. Its universality.
19. Its faith in Jesus.
20. The Greek Bible and the New Testament writings.
21. The comforting message to a sorrowing world.
22. Personification of the ethical ideal in Jesus.
23. Willingness for suffering and martyrdom.
24. Its system of doctrine.
25. The appeal to heroism.
26. Its relief from "tedium vitæ."
27. Its appeal to spirit and power.
28. Exhibition of love and charity.
29. Its ability to deliver from demons.
30. The tidings of a New People.

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31. The construction of a New Race.

32. A universal missionary passion.

33. One righteous God, yet room for numerous demons, spirits, etc.

34. A definite revelation of the will of God; an authoritative Scripture.

35. A world-denying virtue.

36. Sacraments which bring the worshiper into fellowship with a redeeming, living God.

37. The brotherhood of all adherents if not of all men.

It can easily be seen that there is overlapping or repetition here. It will be possible to reduce nearly all in the list of thirty-seven suggestions to ten, which we shall consider, and which, taken together, will suggest the chief reasons for its remarkable power:

The character and teaching of Jesus. The world's calendars are gradually and almost universally making his birth the beginning of an epoch in history. He had a freshness; a love of truth; a capacity for discernment; the ability to set out boldly the essential, leaving the incidental; a way of making old truths to live with new power; a sense of justice; a love of human personality; a patience with the erring; a sympathy with the unfortunate; a catholicity of spirit in the midst of a people inclined to be bigoted; an awareness of and trust in God; a faith in men; a hope of the triumph of love over hate; a heroism that went to the cross for the sake of others, and trusted to win through apparent defeat—all these and more Jesus had in such combination that while he was called the Son of man, yet in a unique sense the church saw in him a revelation of the very character of God. This story was a historical matter. Their own generation had seen and heard him. Such a life could not be lost, and they preached of him not as dead and defeated, but as living and regnant. He, more than any other feature, accounted for the success of Christianity.

The attitude of "no compromise." The world was filled with those who sought to avoid friction, even in matters of principle. It was an era of peace. The "Pax Romana" of the later Augustans inclined to become a "tedium vitæ"

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for courageous and bold spirits. Christianity walked out bravely in the face of contemporary wickedness; it refused to yield to the pagan philosophies or religions. It did not fear even the imperial government. While the "weapons of its warfare were not carnal" they were mighty, and the clash of conflict doubtless attracted daring spirits who wanted to be in on the "good fight." The enlistment was for life and the prize was eternal life.

Faith in Jesus. "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, *even our faith*," says John. The Christian faith was something different from mere belief. It did involve intellectual assent to such ideas as the existence of God, of Christ as having lived and as now living, and of him as representing and revealing God. This belief gradually grew into a somewhat coherent system attractive enough to capture and hold many philosophic minds. But it was more: it involved a trust of one person in the Great Person who was sensed as mutual and loving; and it involved a devotion which would go to the death rather than deny "the faith."

A comforting message. A very suggestive text in this connection is—"Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted."² Christianity had its challenging call to heroism; it also had an outstretched hand in sympathy. To the sick and "demon-possessed" it brought healing and "deliverance"; to the poor it gave alms; it comforted those who mourned; it had special care for orphans and widows; to those who were sick of evil ways it brought promise of a new life in Christ. In every place there is much of comfort needed. Into every life earlier or later sorrow must come, and Christianity had its word of help for all. The habit of compassion was the expression of Christian love.

A world-denying virtue. Not only did the early Chris-

² 2 Cor. 1. 3-4.

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tians put away such practices and attitudes as they believed sinful, but they went beyond this in rejecting much that was good in order that they might the better serve God. It was on this ground that Paul refused pay for his work, that he urged celibacy, that self-denials of many kinds were practised. The spirit of asceticism lay heavily upon the early church, too heavily, many believe. As one reads the stories of the martyrs he cannot but feel that not all really *had* to die, but that some *chose* to do so, in order that they "might obtain a better resurrection." When the church finally came under the patronage and blandishments of the state, many of the world-denying saints went out into the wilderness and there they set up a beginning of the monastic orders. None can doubt that these Christians of the ascetic type deeply influenced the mind of their age.

Efficient organization. It has been previously stated that there was a "minimum of organization." But what they had was very effective. First, it followed the synagogue model, but as the congregations grew and additional elders were appointed, one was elected to preside, who was "*primus inter pares*." He was given the Greek name meaning "superintendent"; namely "episcopos," or "bishop." He, with his elders and their helpers, had charge of the church, one bishop usually having oversight of a large church. The great provincial cities had the larger churches and the stronger bishops. Thus a shift was made from the Jewish to the Imperial type of organization, with great leaders in nearly all the prominent cities of the empire. The church had the advantage over the empire here, for it was not thrown about by every political wind that blew, and in many cases the character and permanence of the bishop made him really more influential than the Roman governor. This was certainly true during the barbarian invasions of Rome in the fifth century.

A Scripture of authority. The Greek Old Testament had come to the church with its character for sanctity and authority already established. It was with a sense of relief that many pagans fell back upon its ideals so ancient and revered, and trusted the truth there found. The

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books of the New Testament were rapidly coming into existence and into use. The youthful and exuberant period of the church gave a group of writings which deal with such courage and finality with many great problems that these Scriptures have become the textbooks of education in morals and religion. Such a body of literature enshrining great personalities, and such healing, helping words constituted an incomparable means of strength to early Christianity.

Adaptation to its own day. What a good thing it was that the Good News soon passed out of Palestinian hands! Had the church sought, as at first, to Judaize all who would come, it is doubtful if it would exist to-day. But it took on a Gentile and more universal type. It adapted itself to the religious wants, hopes, aims, emotions, and fears of the common people. It found ways to organization, of administration, of preaching and teaching which would speak to the people in a language all their own. A good part of the success of Christianity lay in its abandonment of rigidity for adaptability in all which involved no surrender of the ethical or religious ideal.

Universality, brotherhood. The longing for freedom from racial and local barriers in religion was present throughout the empire. The all-embracing conquests of Alexander and the world-empire of Rome had made a type of mind which sought universalism in religion. This many of the other religions contemporary with early Christianity sought to supply. Granting the sincerity of their attempts, it must be said that there was an audacity about the democracy of the Christian movement which surpassed them all. All were brothers and equals before God. So far as we can understand, they aimed at a democracy which broke down superior claims of race, language, culture, or even of sex. In meeting this widespread longing, the church exercised a mighty element of strength.

The ethical ideal. Next to the influence exerted by the personality and teaching of Jesus himself, the high moral excellence of the church was its *supreme apologetic*. Christianity won by the lives of the Christians. We have

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an "Apology" coming from the second century. It is written by a philosopher named Aristides. In this he described, among the evidences for Christianity, the good lives of the Christians of his time. The quotation is a famous one, and although long, merits thoughtful reading, for in it we may see the ethical ideal which wrought so powerfully. It is addressed to the emperor, and reads:

But the Christians, O King, while they went about and made search, have found the truth. . . . For they know and trust in God, the Creator of heaven and earth, in whom and through whom are all things, to whom there is no other god as companion, from whom they receive commandments which they engraved upon their minds and observe in expectation of the world which is to come. Wherefore they do not commit adultery, nor fornication, nor bear false witness, nor embezzle what is held in pledge, nor covet what is not theirs. They honor father and mother and show kindness to those near to them; and whenever they are judges they judge uprightly. They do not worship idols, made in the image of man; and whatsoever they would not that others should do unto them, they do not to others; and of the food which is consecrated to idols they do not eat, for they are pure. And their oppressors they appease and make them their friends; they do good to their enemies; and their women, O King, are pure as virgins, and their daughters are modest; and their men keep themselves from every unlawful union, and from all uncleanness in the hope of a recompense to come in the other world. Further, if one or other of them have bond-men and bond-women or children, through love toward them they persuade them to become Christians, and when they have done so, they hail them as brethren without distinction. They do not worship strange gods, and they go their way in all modesty and cheerfulness. Falsehood is not found among them, and they love one another; and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly. And he who has gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him into their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother; for they do not call them brethren after the flesh, but after the spirit and in God. And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to his ability gives heed to him, and carefully sees to his burial. And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity, and if it is possible to redeem him they set him free. And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food. They

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observe the precepts of their Messiah with much care, living justly and soberly as the Lord commanded them. Every morning and every hour they give thanks and praise to God for his lovingkindness toward them; and for their food and for their drink they offer thanksgiving to him. And if any righteous man among them passes from the world they rejoice and offer thanks to God; and they escort his body as if he were setting out from one place to another near. And when a child has been born to one of them they give thanks to God, and moreover if he happen to die in childhood they give thanks to God the more, as for one who has passed through the world without sins. And further, if they see that any one of them dies in his ungodliness or in his sins, for him they grieve bitterly and sorrow as for one who goes to meet his doom.³

These, then, were the credentials of the church; it was by these that she conquered.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Tell of the strength of the religious opposition over which Christianity won.
2. What were its social and economic limitations?
3. Name the ten chief reasons for the success of Christianity.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which, do you think, had the more formidable religious opponents, the early church, or that of to-day?
2. What are the chief religious systems of our day with which Christianity has to deal? Which are chief in our own land?
3. Can you think of any other factor, worthy of mention, which you would add to the thirty-seven given? Would you reject any of that list?
4. Would you make any change in the list of ten as given? If so, what?
5. Might all ten of these be of use in our own day? If not, which?
6. If asked to give reasons for a hope of the ultimate supremacy of the Christian ideal, what would you give?

³ Quoted from translation in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. IX. Published by Charles Scribner's Sons. Revised Ed. 1926.

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